amar chitra katha

No. 94 Rs. 2

NARSINH MEHTA

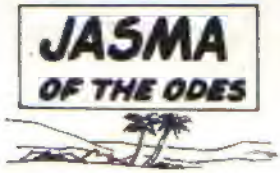
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

"Vaishnava Jana to..." was Gandhiji's favourite bhajan. This verse along with thousands of songs, hymns and bhajans were composed by Narsinh Mehta, the poet of Gujarat. Narsinh was a great devotee of Lord Krishna, and he had complete faith in the Lord. From his early childhood, he had passed on the entire burden of his livelihood to the Lord. He himself was engrossed in composing and singing bhajans, leaving the strains and stresses of domestic life to his Lord.

Today untouchability is punishable under the law. Nevertheless, Harijans (people of the scheduled caste) do not feel secure and are victims of unabashed tyranny. Imagine the plight of these people more than five hundred years back, when a high-caste Hindu had to take a ritualistic bath if the mere shadow of a Harijan fell on him. Narsinh Mehta went to sing hymns in the Harijan locality and dared the wrath of the orthodox society. He was a social reformer with rare courage. The word "Harijan", which Mahatma Gandhi later used for referring to the people of the scheduled caste, was first coined by Narsinh. His aloofness from family life was proverbial. He sang bhajans even as his wife and son breathed their last.

Presented here is the pictorial saga of Narsinh's life, full of dramatic events and amazing anecdotes.

OUR NEXT TITLE :



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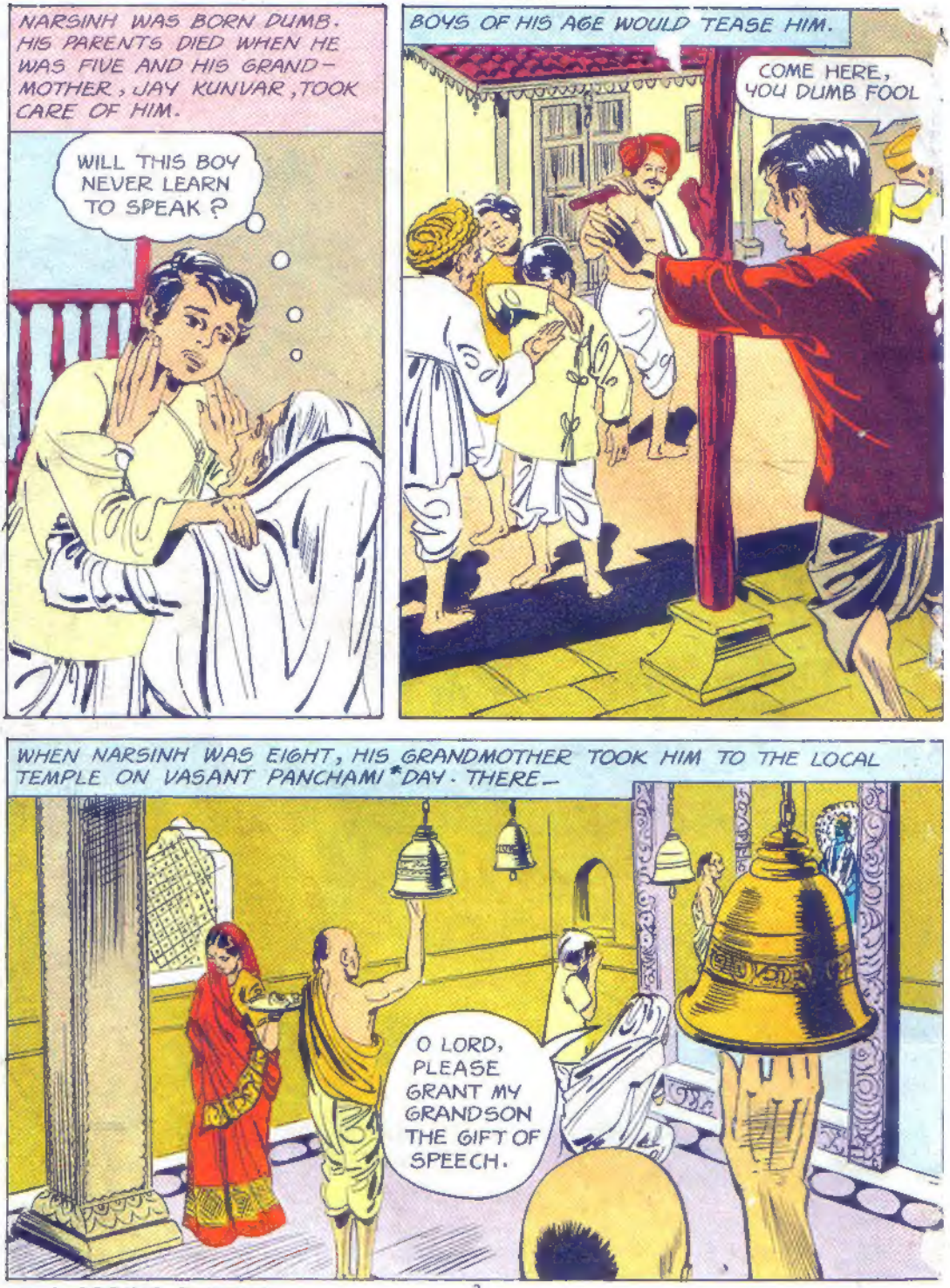
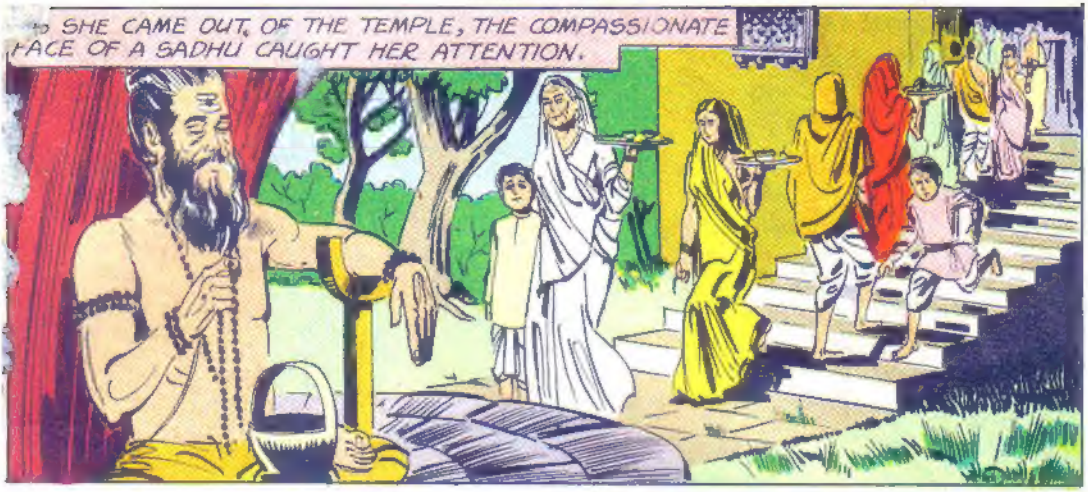
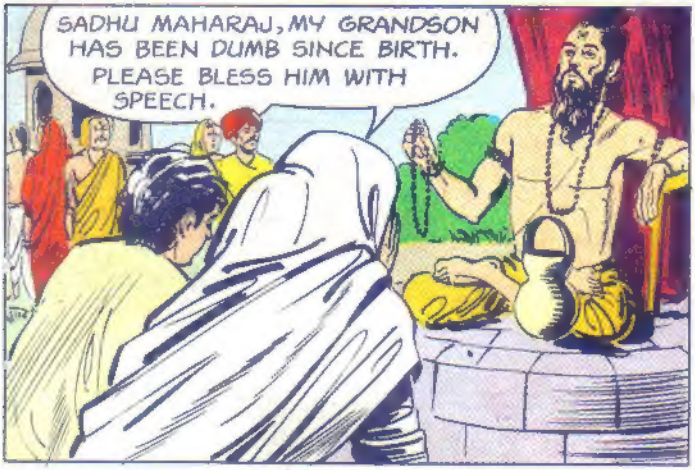
NARSINH MEHTA WAS THE SON OF A NAGAR *BRAHMAN OF TALAJA, A SMALL VILLAGE IN SAURASHTRA.

* A SECT OF BRAHMANS

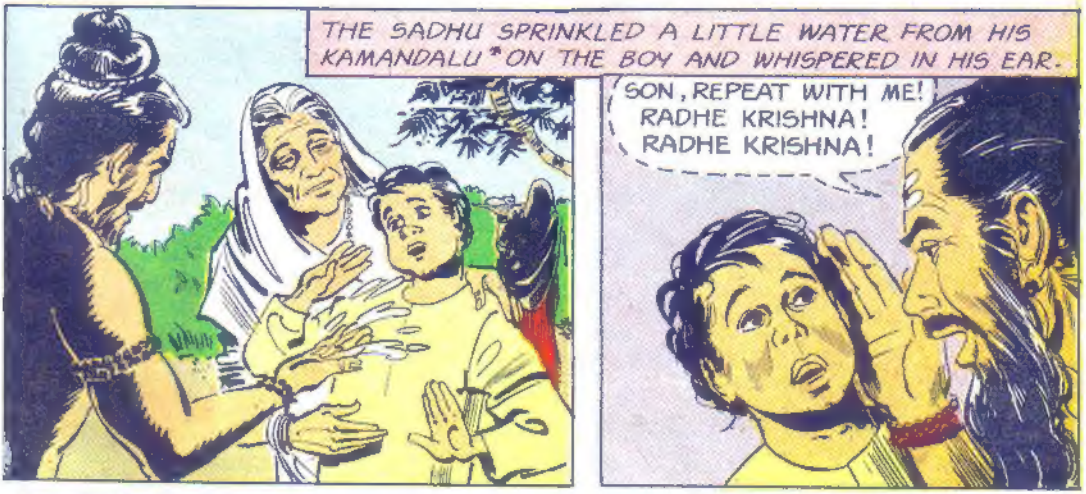


* A SPRING FESTIVAL.


SHE CAME OUT OF THE TEMPLE, THE COMPASSIONATE FACE OF A SADHU CAUGHT HER ATTENTION.

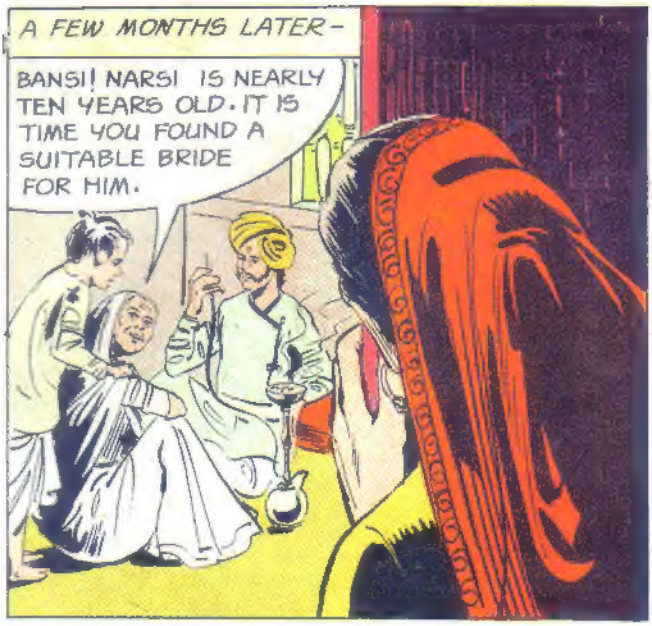

SADHU MAHARAJ, MY GRANDSON HAS BEEN DUMB SINCE BIRTH. PLEASE BLESS HIM WITH SPEECH.

HE IS DESTINED TO BE A GREAT DEVOTEE OF LORD KRISHNA. HE SHALL SPEAK.

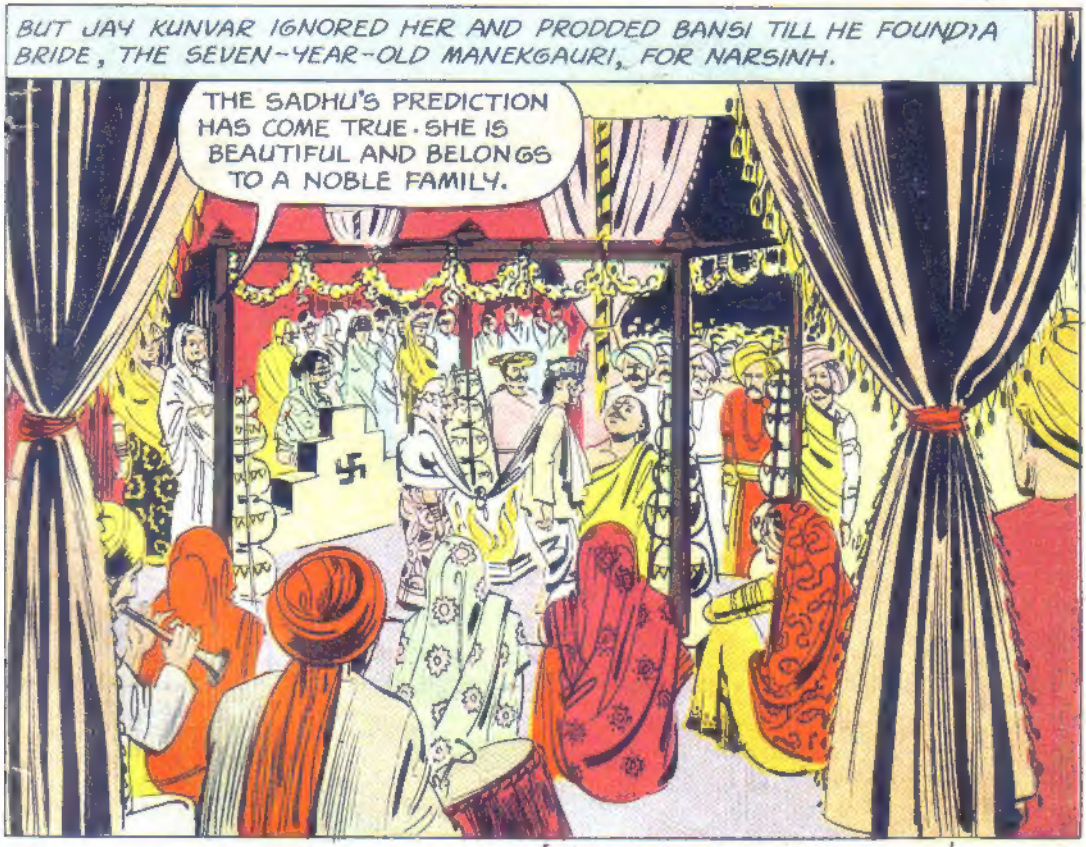

THE SADHU SPRINKLED A LITTLE WATER FROM HIS KAMANDALU* ON THE BOY AND WHISPERED IN HIS EAR.
SON, REPEAT WITH ME! RADHE KRISHNA! RADHE KRISHNA!

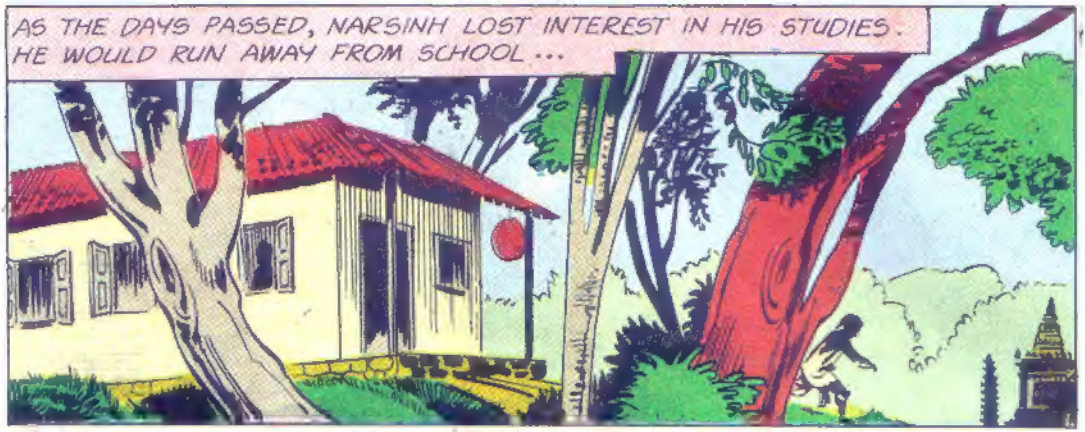
* A BOWL.

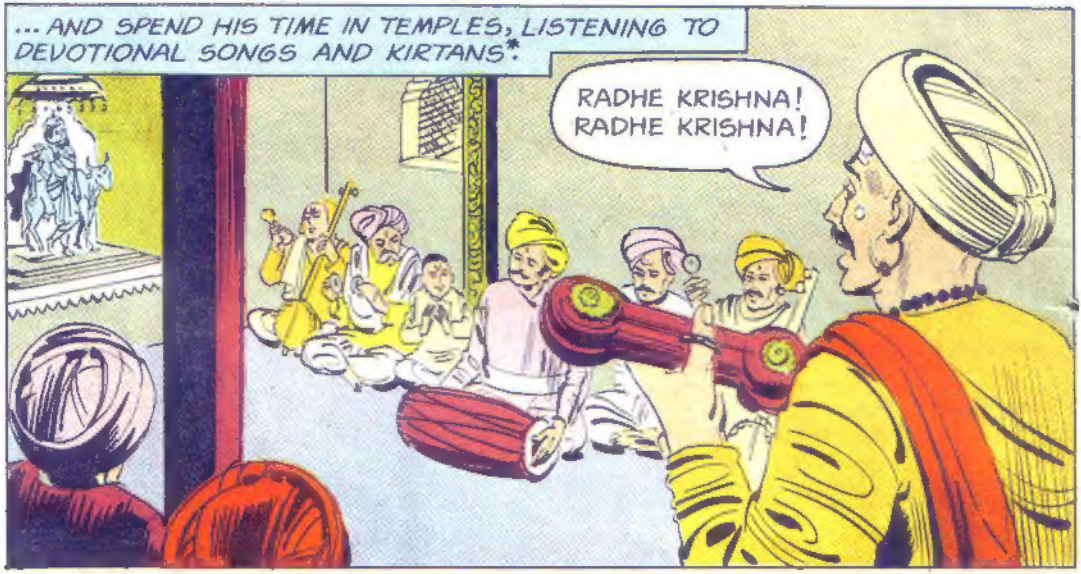
THE OLD WOMAN LOOKED EXPECTANTLY AT THE CHILD AND LO!
RADHE KRISHNA! RADHE KRISHNA!
HE CAN SPEAK! MY GRANDSON CAN SPEAK!!
SADHU MAHARAJ, YOU HAVE BEEN KIND TO US! NOW PLEASE TELL ME MORE ABOUT HIS FUTURE.
HE WILL SOON BE MARRIED TO A BEAUTIFUL GIRL FROM A NOBLE FAMILY.
A YEAR LATER, HAPPY AT THE TRANSFORMATION IN YOUNG NARSINH, JAY KUNVAR TOOK HIM TO JUNAGADH, WHERE HIS COUSIN BANSIDHAR SERVED AS A HEAD-CONSTABLE.
NOW THAT THE BOY CAN SPEAK, YOU SHOULD EDUCATE HIM.
I WILL, GRANDMOTHER!
BANSI'S WIFE, DURITGAURI, HOWEVER, RESENTED THE NEWCOMER.

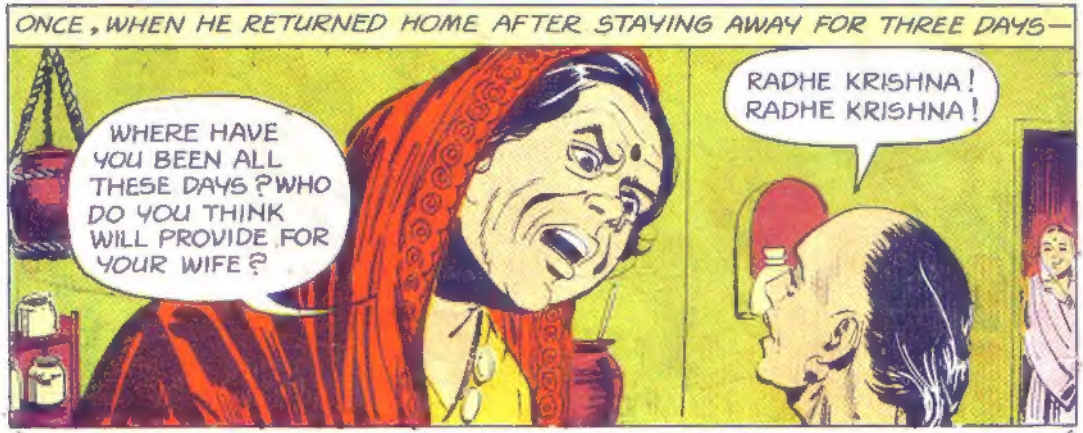

A FEW MONTHS LATER-
BANSI! NARSI IS NEARLY TEN YEARS OLD. IT IS TIME YOU FOUND A SUITABLE BRIDE FOR HIM.

IT'S BEEN BAD ENOUGH HAVING TO FEED THE USELESS BOY. NOW THEY WANT TO ADD MORE MOUTHS TO FEED.
HOW CAN A FOOL LIKE HIM RUN A HOUSEHOLD?

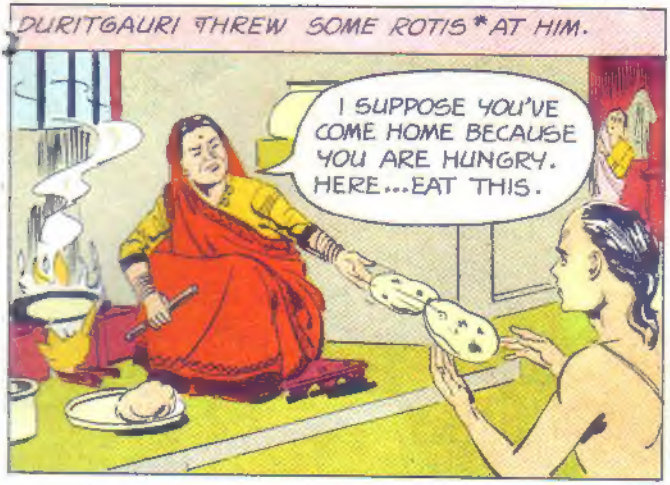

BUT JAY KUNVAR IGNORED HER AND PRODDED BANSI TILL HE FOUND A BRIDE, THE SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MANEKGAURI, FOR NARSINH.
THE SADHU'S PREDICTION HAS COME TRUE. SHE IS BEAUTIFUL AND BELONGS TO A NOBLE FAMILY.



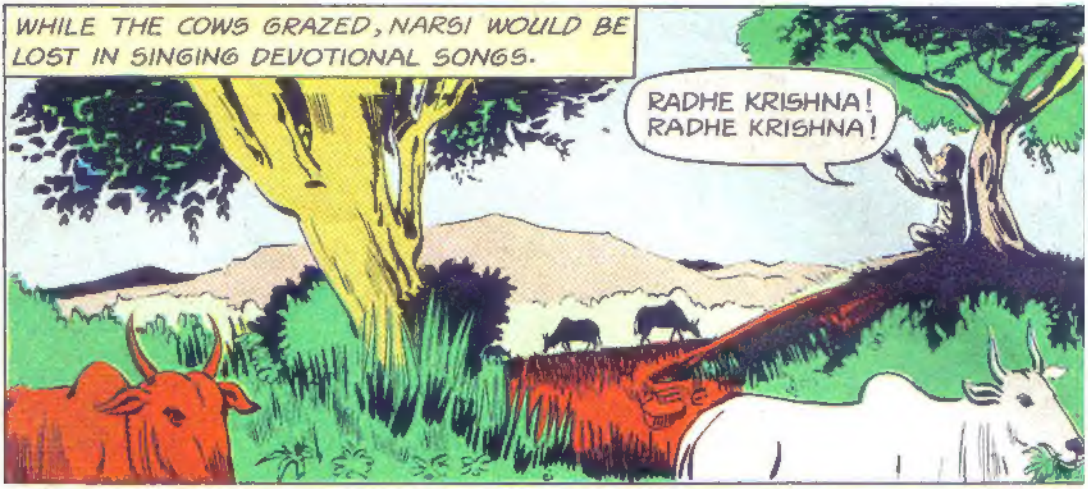


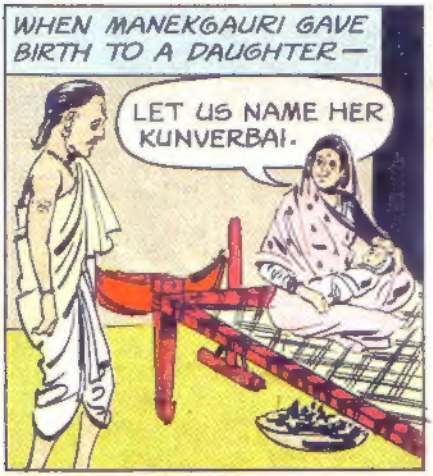


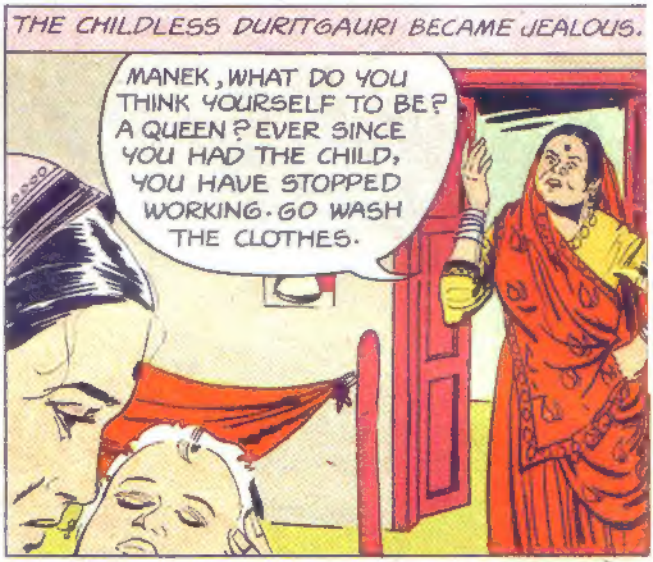
*RELIGIOUS STORIES TOLD MOSTLY THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF SONGS

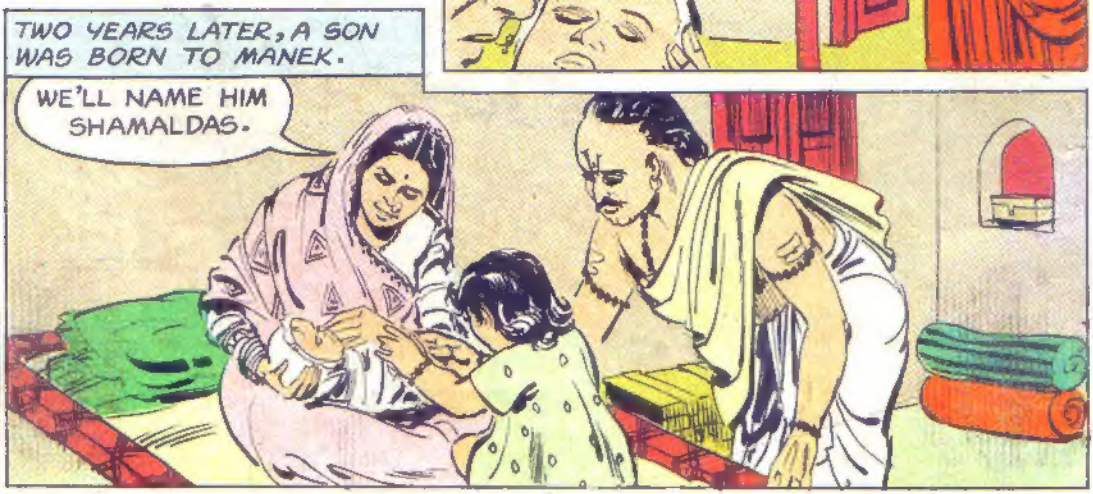


* UNLEAVENED BREAD.


WHILE THE COWS GRAZED, NARSI WOULD BE LOST IN SINGING DEVOTIONAL SONGS.
RADHE KRISHNA! RADHE KRISHNA!

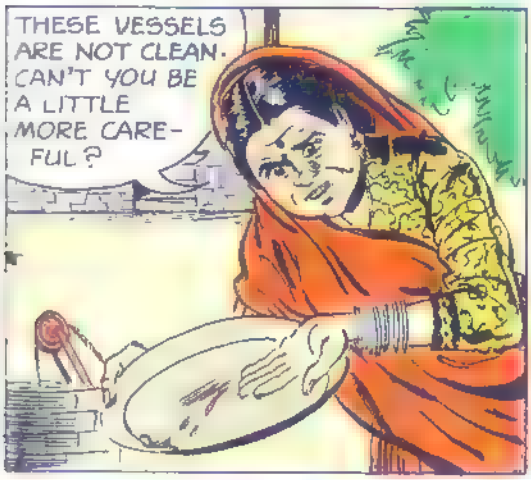

WHEN MANEKGAURI GAVE BIRTH TO A DAUGHTER—
LET US NAME HER KUNVERBAI.

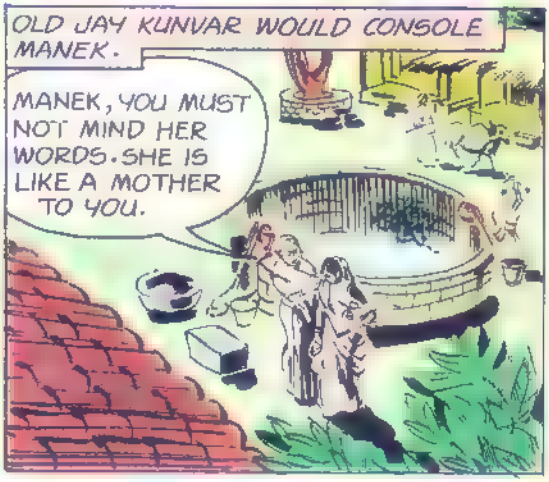

THE CHILDLESS DURITGAURI BECAME JEALOUS.
MANEK, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOURSELF TO BE? A QUEEN? EVER SINCE YOU HAD THE CHILD, YOU HAVE STOPPED WORKING. GO WASH THE CLOTHES.

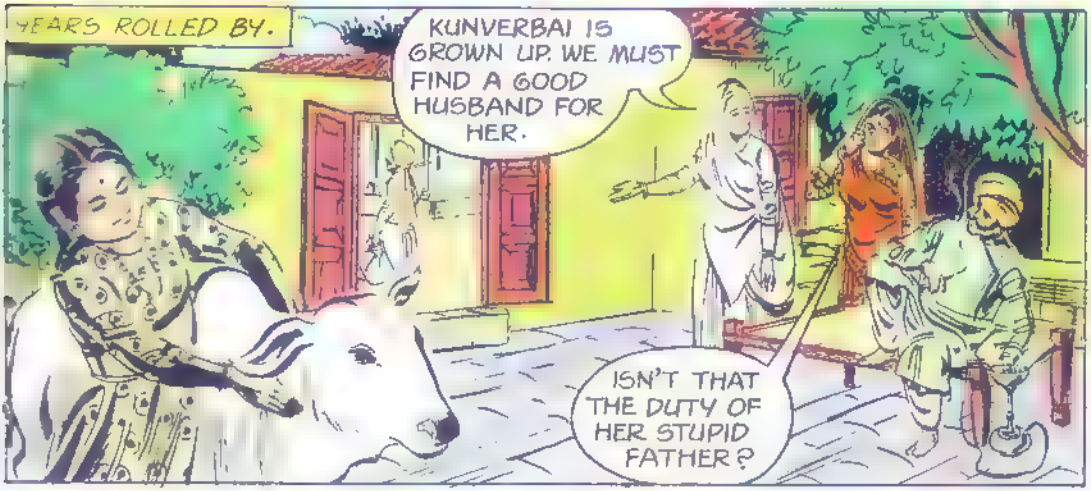

TWO YEARS LATER, A SON WAS BORN TO MANEK.
WE'LL NAME HIM SHAMALDAS.

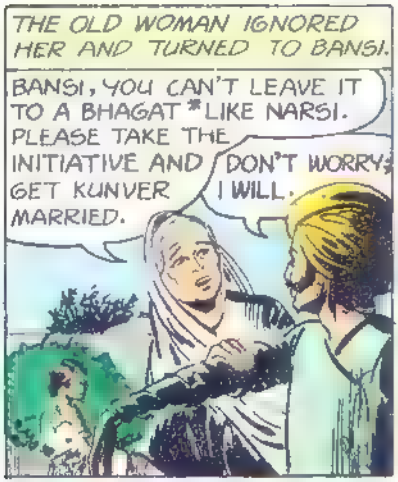
DURITGAURI COULD NOT BEAR MANEK'S GOOD FORTUNE.
AM I A SLAVE? HOW LONG SHOULD WE CARRY THE BURDEN OF FEEDING THEIR GROWING FAMILY?

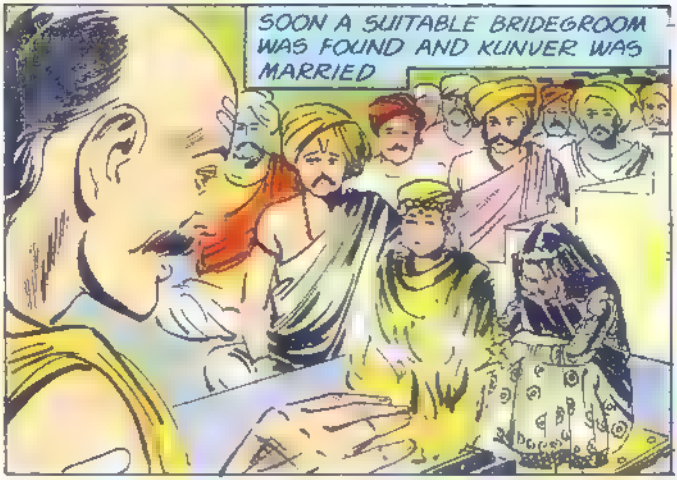
AREN'T YOU ASHAMED THAT YOUR HUSBAND IS A LOAFER? HOW LONG CAN WE CONTINUE TO FEED YOU?

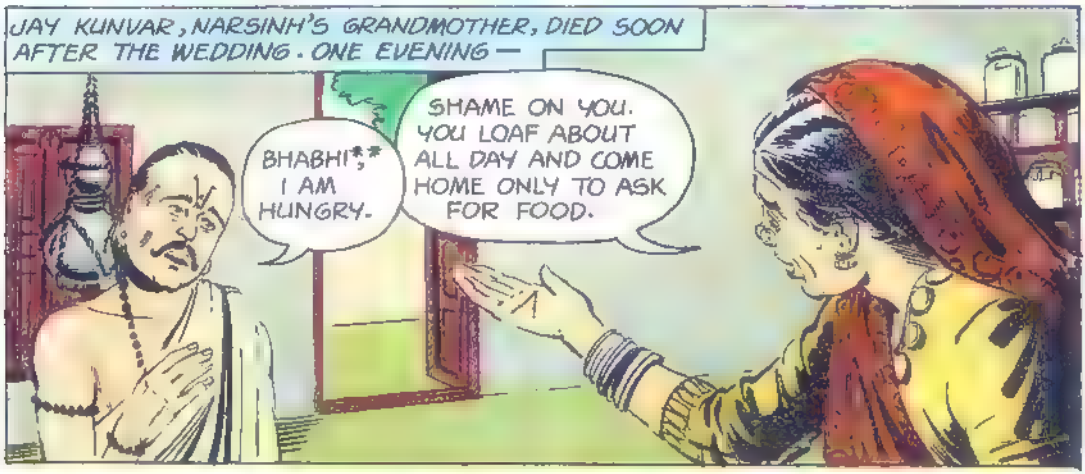

THESE VESSELS ARE NOT CLEAN. CAN'T YOU BE A LITTLE MORE CAREFUL?

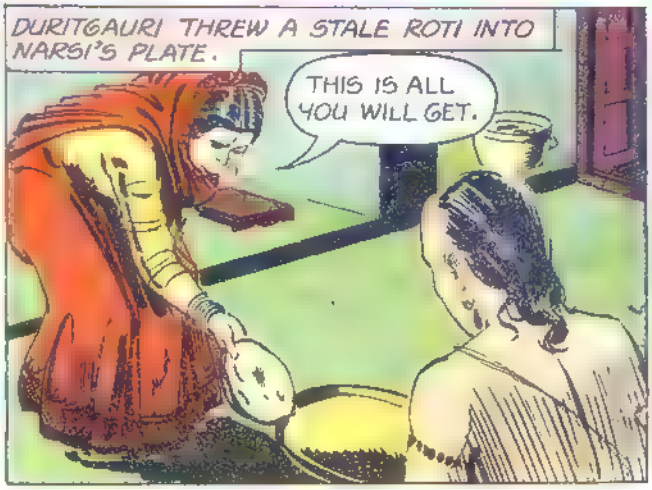

OLD JAY KUNVAR WOULD CONSOLE MANEK.
MANEK, YOU MUST NOT MIND HER WORDS. SHE IS LIKE A MOTHER TO YOU.


YEARS ROLLED BY.
KUNVERBAI IS GROWN UP. WE MUST FIND A GOOD HUSBAND FOR HER.
ISN'T THAT THE DUTY OF HER STUPID FATHER?





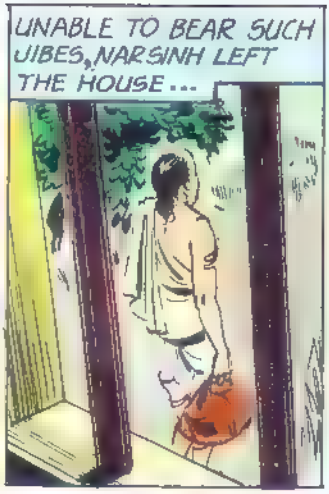




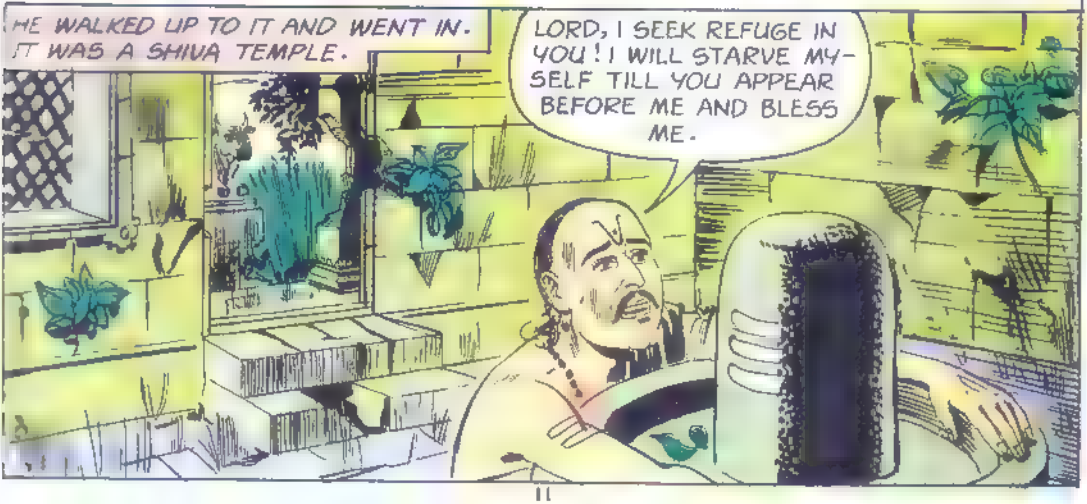
* DEVOTEE

** SISTER-IN-LAW.

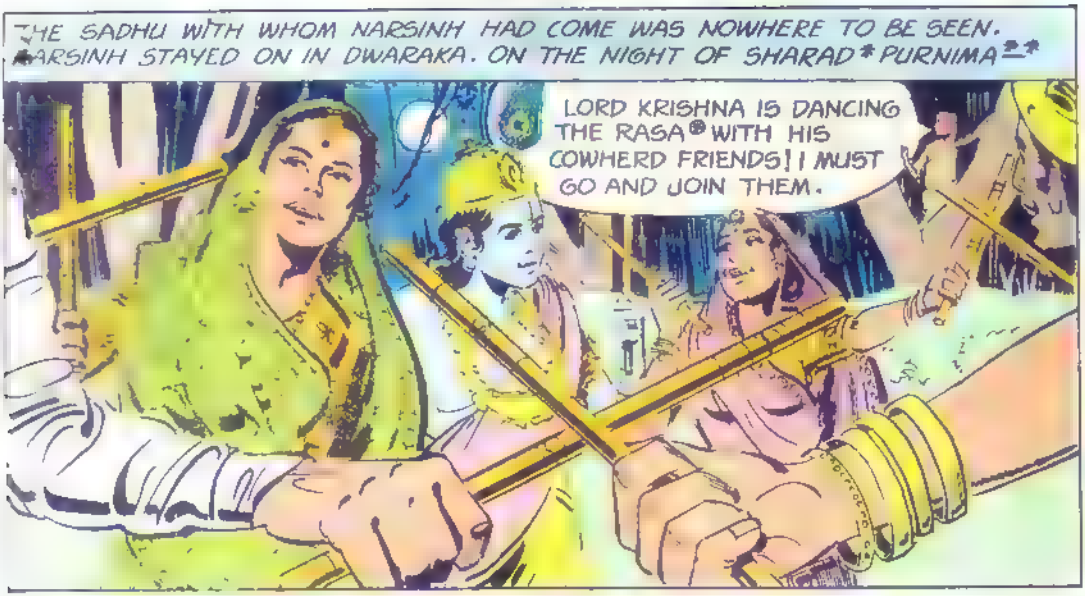
BHABHI, THIS ROTI IS AS TOUGH AS LEATHER.
IF YOU LIKE GOOD FOOD, WHY DON'T YOU EARN IT? EVEN A PARIAH-DOG HAS MORE SELF-RE-SPECT THAN YOU.

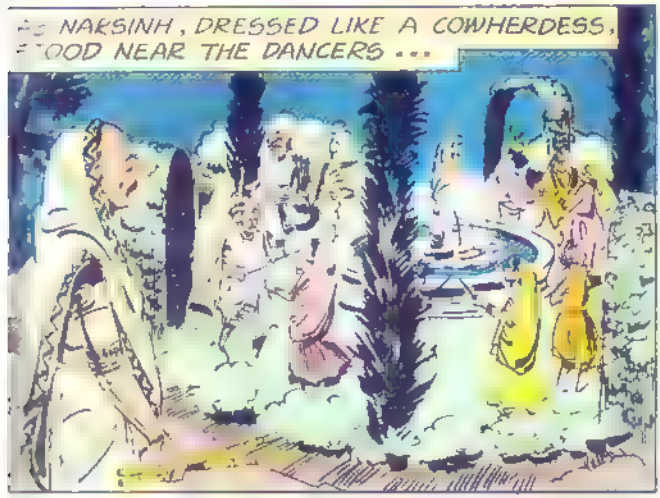

UNABLE TO BEAR SUCH JIBES, NARSINH LEFT THE HOUSE...

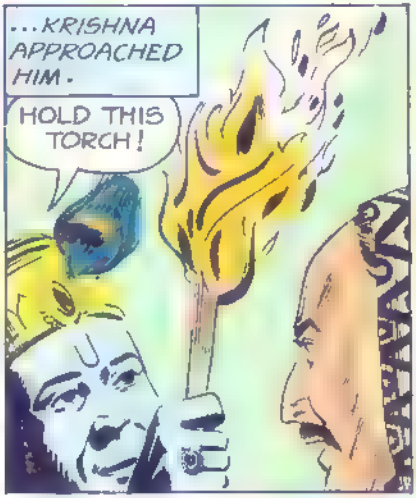
...AND WALKED AIMLESSLY FOR ABOUT 20 MILES. THEN, TIRED, HE STRETCHED HIMSELF OUT BELOW A BANYAN TREE. AS HE WONDERED WHAT TO DO, HIS GAZE FELL UPON A TEMPLE IN THE DISTANCE.

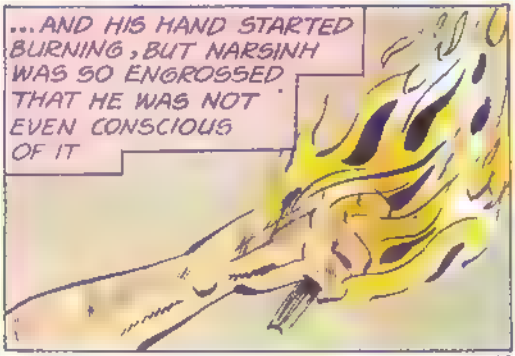

HE WALKED UP TO IT AND WENT IN. IT WAS A SHIVA TEMPLE.
LORD, I SEEK REFUGE IN YOU! I WILL STARVE MY-SELF TILL YOU APPEAR BEFORE ME AND BLESS ME.

A WEEK LATER, A SADHU STOOD BEFORE NARSINH
I AM PLEASED WITH YOU. ASK FOR A BOON!
HOW FORTUNATE I AM. GIVE ME THAT WHICH YOU PRIZE MOST.
THE SADHU TOOK NARSINH TO LORD KRISHNA'S TEMPLE IN DWARAKA. THERE —
NARSINH, I AM PLEASED WITH YOU. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
NOTHING, MY LORD.
WHAT I VALUE MOST IS A VISION OF LORD KRISHNA. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HIM?
YOU COULD NOT HAVE OFFERED ME A MORE PRECIOUS BOON, MY LORD!

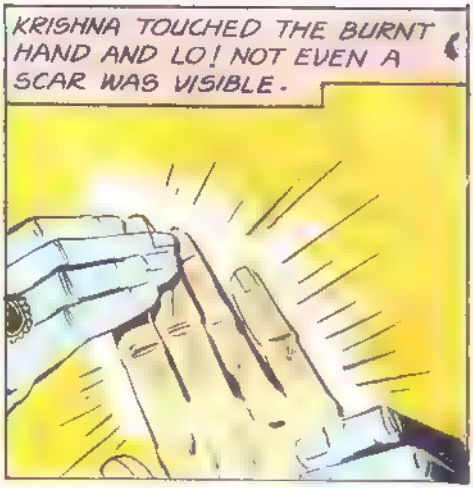


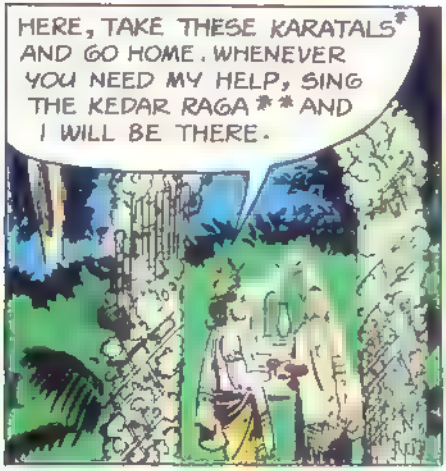


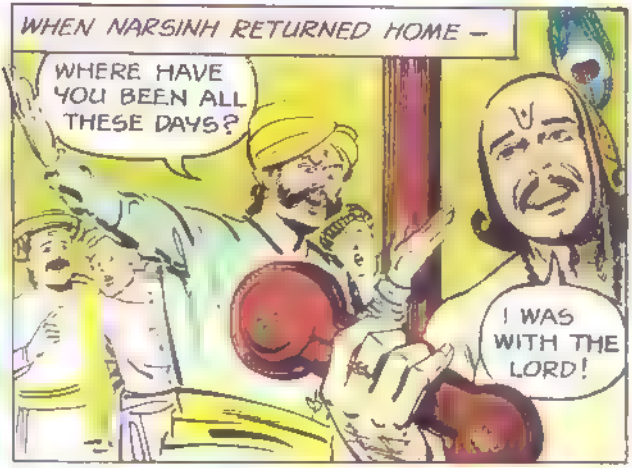


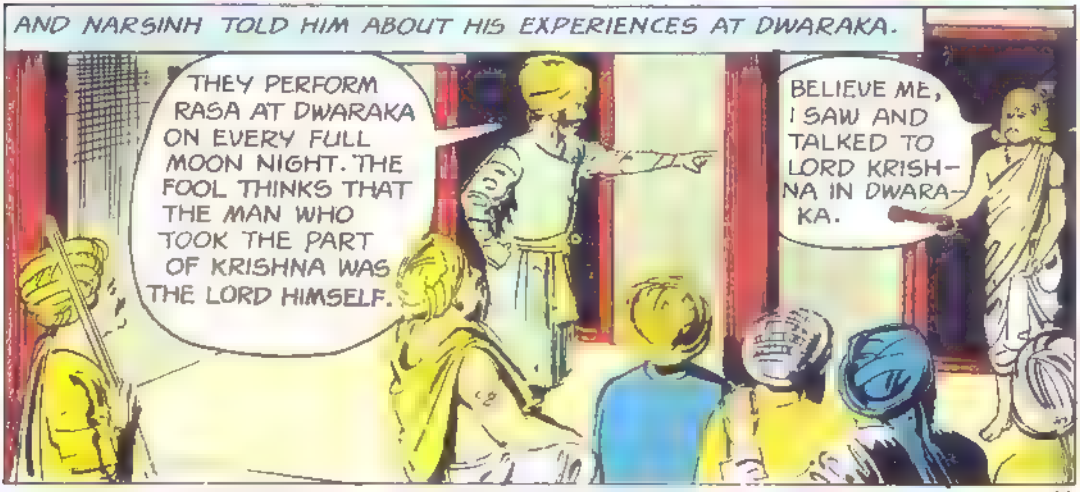


* ONE OF THE SIX INDIAN SEASONS. ** FULL MOON ® A DANCE FORM.







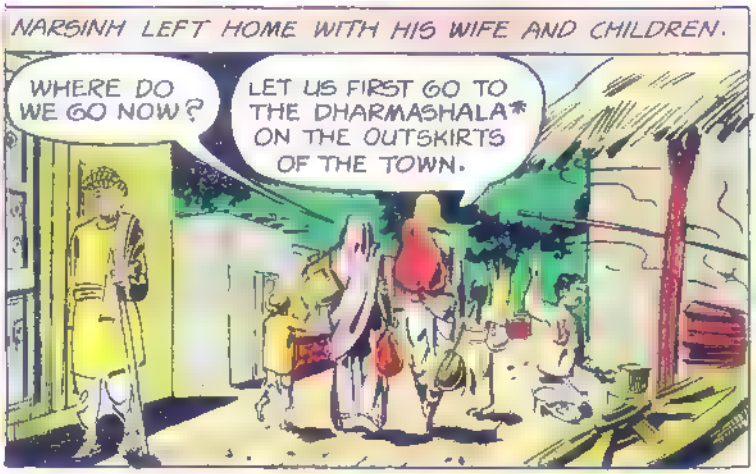


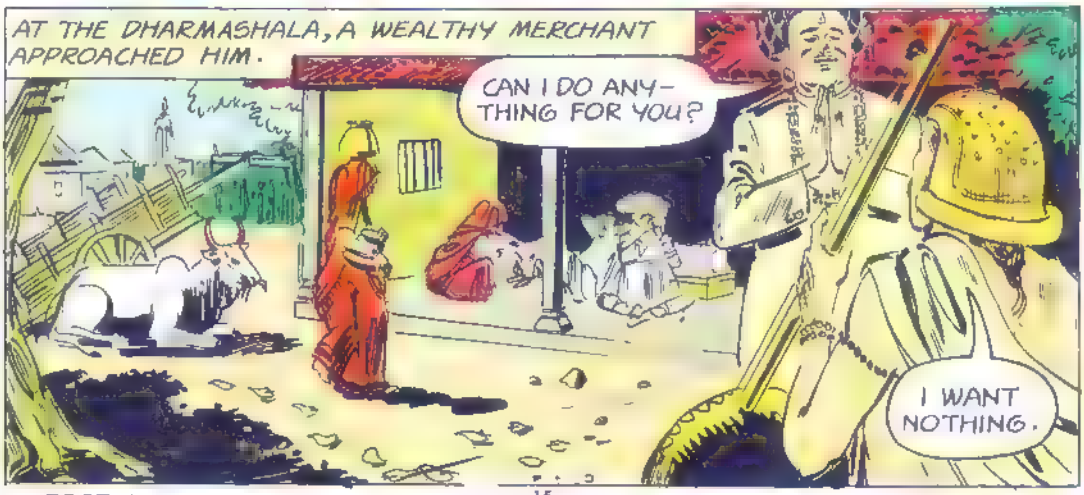
* MUSICAL INSTRUMENT. ** NAME OF AN INDIAN MUSICAL MODE.

BANSI WAS FURIOUS.
CAST OFF THAT DRESS. GO AND FIND SOME WORK.
I CAN'T CAST AWAY THIS DRESS. NEVER.

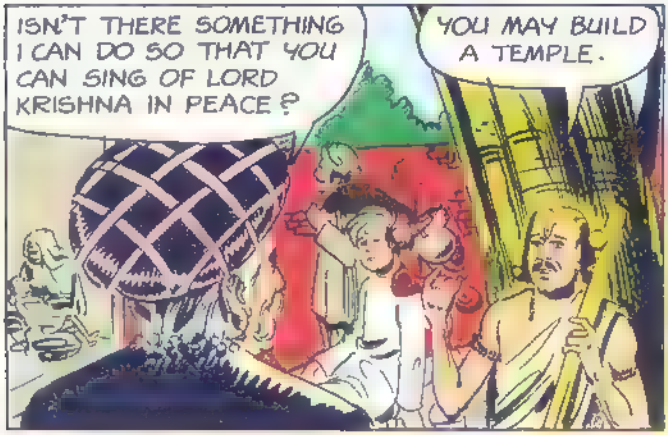
IN THAT CASE, YOU NEEDN'T STAY HERE. GO AWAY!

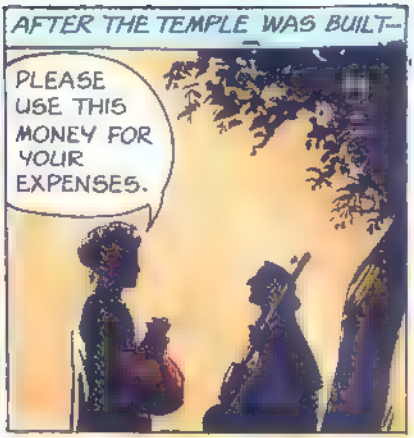
WAIT! I WILL ALSO COME WITH YOU.

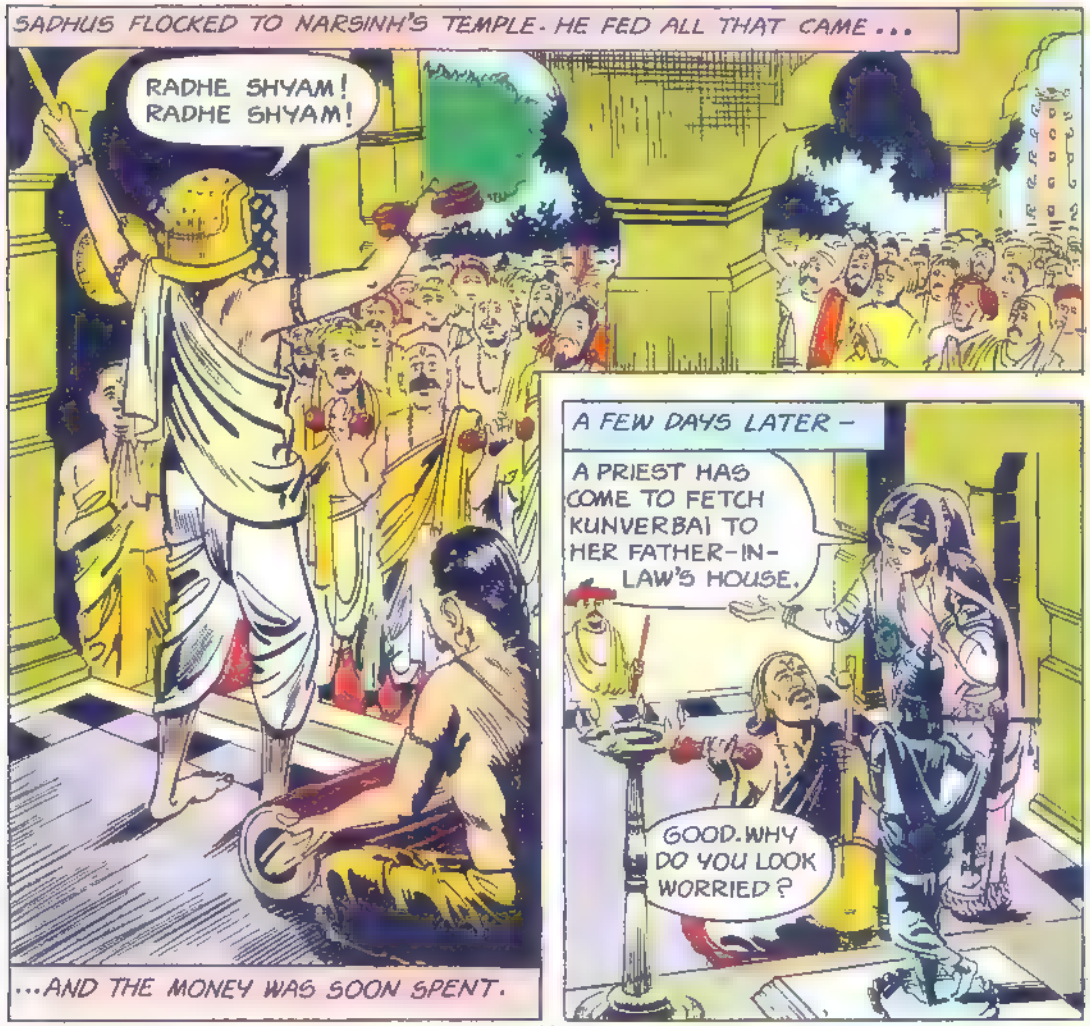

NARSINH LEFT HOME WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN.
WHERE DO WE GO NOW?
LET US FIRST GO TO THE DHARMASHALA* ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN.

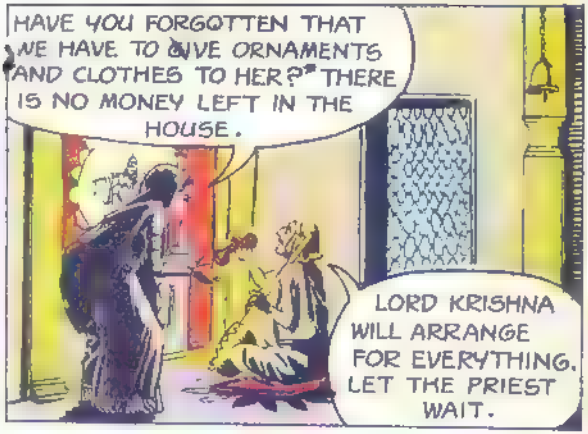

AT THE DHARMASHALA, A WEALTHY MERCHANT APPROACHED HIM.
CAN I DO ANY-THING FOR YOU?
I WANT NOTHING.

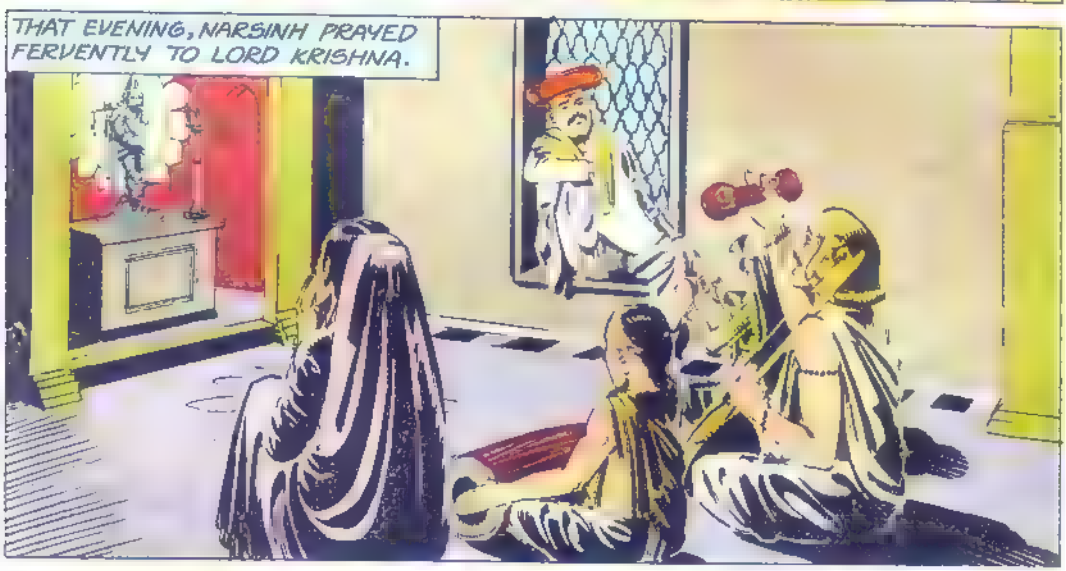
* FREE INN.

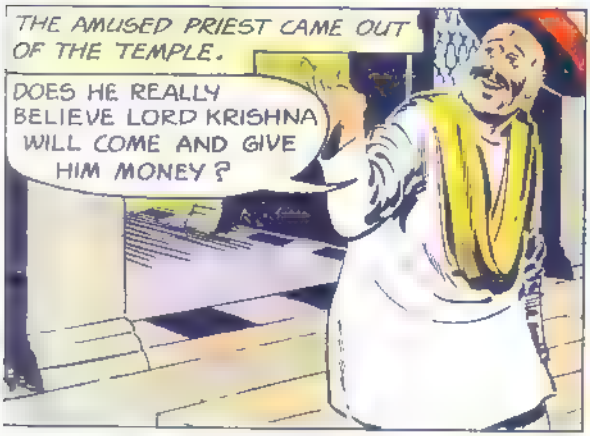

ISN'T THERE SOMETHING I CAN DO SO THAT YOU CAN SING OF LORD KRISHNA IN PEACE?
YOU MAY BUILD A TEMPLE.


AFTER THE TEMPLE WAS BUILT–
PLEASE USE THIS MONEY FOR YOUR EXPENSES.

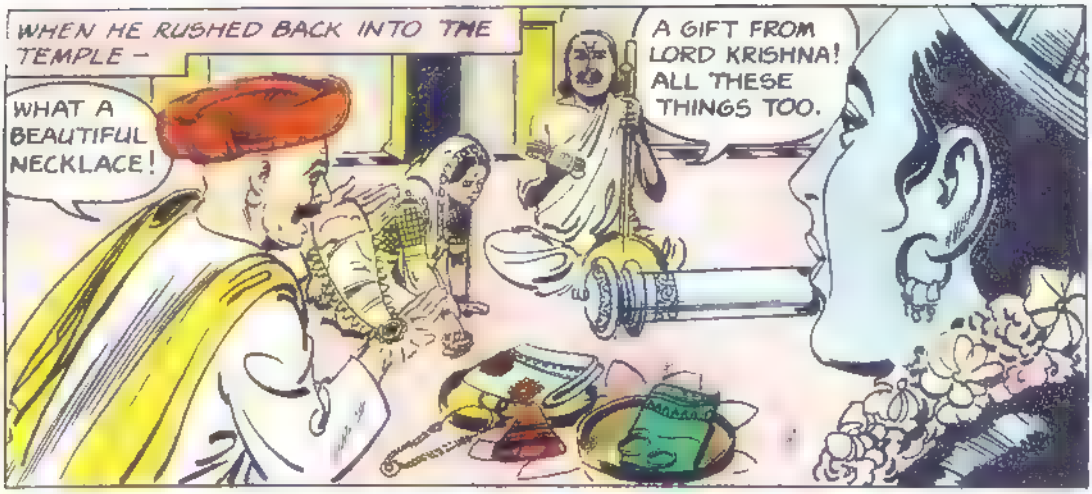

SADHUS FLOCKED TO NARSINH'S TEMPLE. HE FED ALL THAT CAME...
RADHE SHYAM! RADHE SHYAM!
...AND THE MONEY WAS SOON SPENT.
A FEW DAYS LATER –
A PRIEST HAS COME TO FETCH KUNVERBAI TO HER FATHER-IN-LAW'S HOUSE.
GOOD. WHY DO YOU LOOK WORRIED?

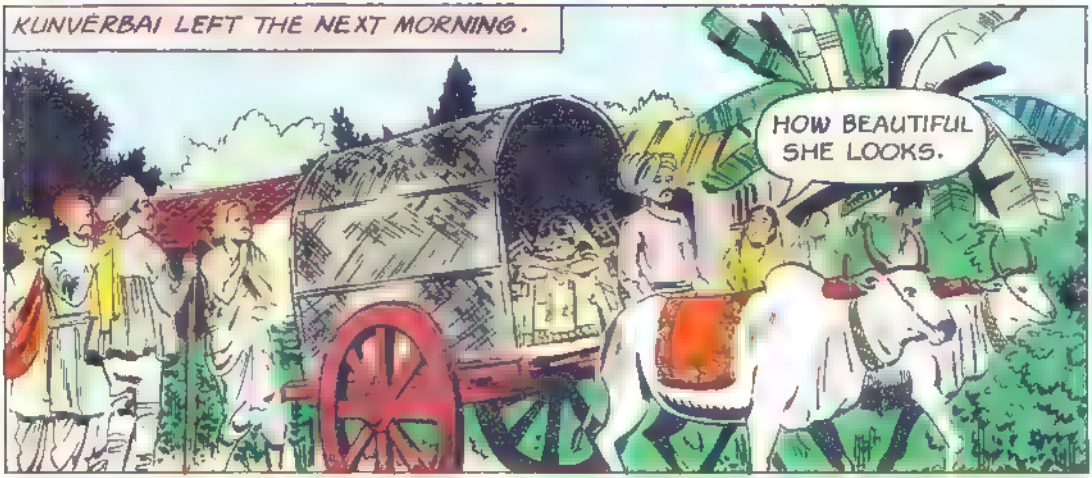


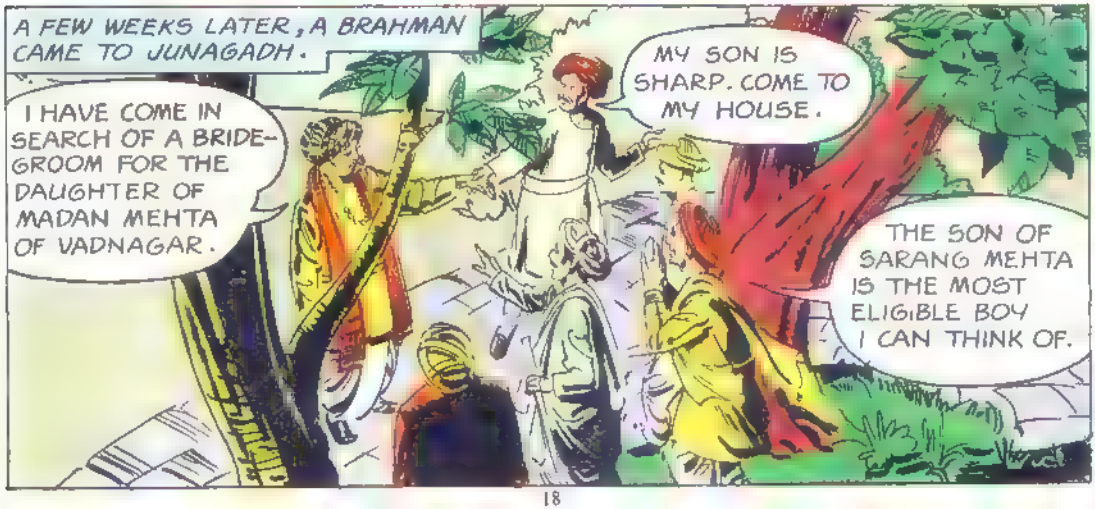


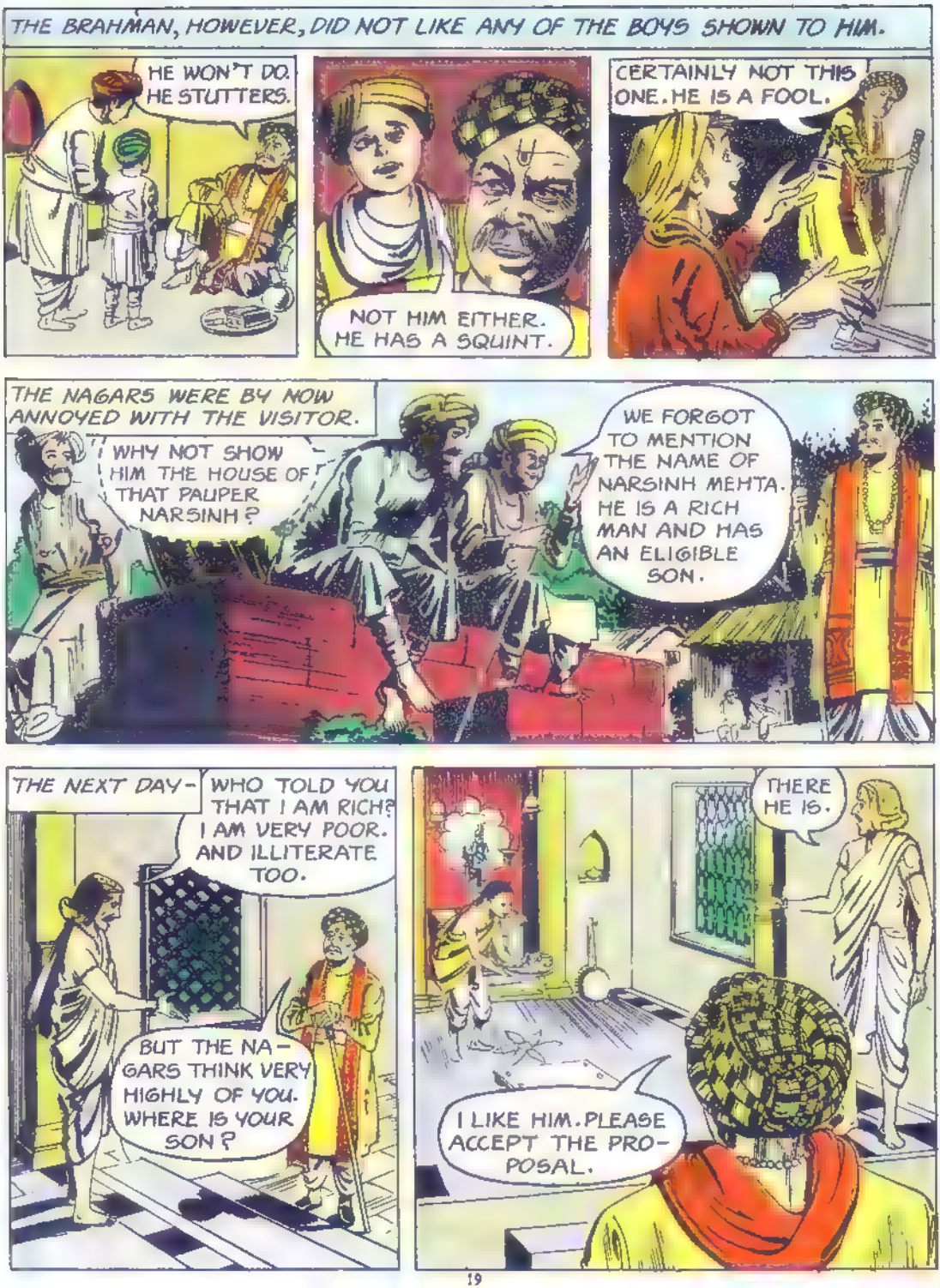


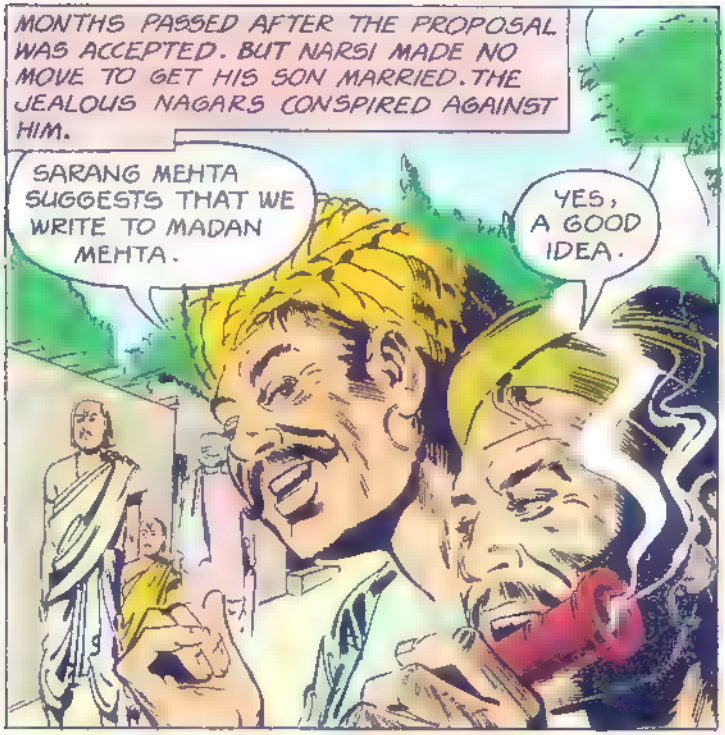
* IN THE DAYS OF CHILD MARRIAGE, THE BRIDE WOULD STAY ON IN HER PARENTS' HOME TILL SHE ATTAINED MATURITY.


WHEN HE RUSHED BACK INTO THE TEMPLE –
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NECKLACE!
A GIFT FROM LORD KRISHNA! ALL THESE THINGS TOO.

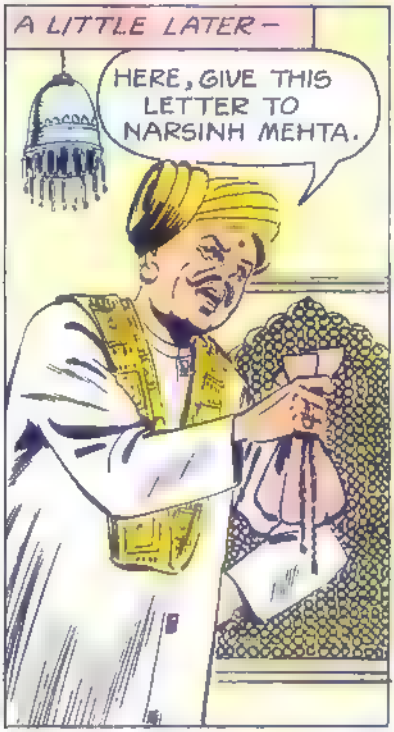

KUNVERBAI LEFT THE NEXT MORNING.
HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE LOOKS.


A FEW WEEKS LATER, A BRAHMAN CAME TO JUNAGADH.
I HAVE COME IN SEARCH OF A BRIDEGROOM FOR THE DAUGHTER OF MADAN MEHTA OF VADNAGAR.
MY SON IS SHARP. COME TO MY HOUSE.
THE SON OF SARANG MEHTA IS THE MOST ELIGIBLE BOY I CAN THINK OF.


THE BRAHMAN, HOWEVER, DID NOT LIKE ANY OF THE BOYS SHOWN TO HIM.
HE WON'T DO. HE STUTTERS.
NOT HIM EITHER. HE HAS A SQUINT.
CERTAINLY NOT THIS ONE. HE IS A FOOL.
THE NAGARS WERE BY NOW ANNOYED WITH THE VISITOR.
WHY NOT SHOW HIM THE HOUSE OF THAT PAUPER NARSINH?
WE FORGOT TO MENTION THE NAME OF NARSINH MEHTA. HE IS A RICH MAN AND HAS AN ELIGIBLE SON.
THE NEXT DAY-
WHO TOLD YOU THAT I AM RICH? I AM VERY POOR. AND ILLITERATE TOO.
BUT THE NAGARS THINK VERY HIGHLY OF YOU. WHERE IS YOUR SON?
THERE HE IS.
I LIKE HIM. PLEASE ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL.

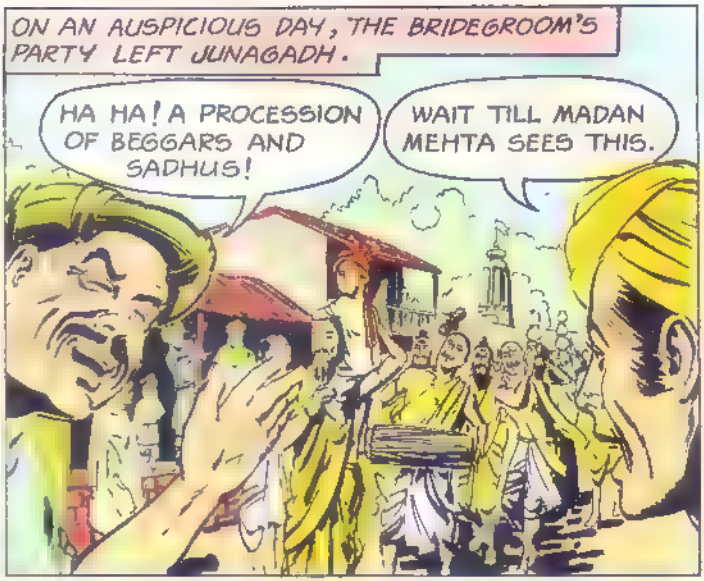

MONTHS PASSED AFTER THE PROPOSAL WAS ACCEPTED. BUT NARSI MADE NO MOVE TO GET HIS SON MARRIED. THE JEALOUS NAGARS CONSPIRED AGAINST HIM.
SARANG MEHTA SUGGESTS THAT WE WRITE TO MADAN MEHTA.
YES, A GOOD IDEA.

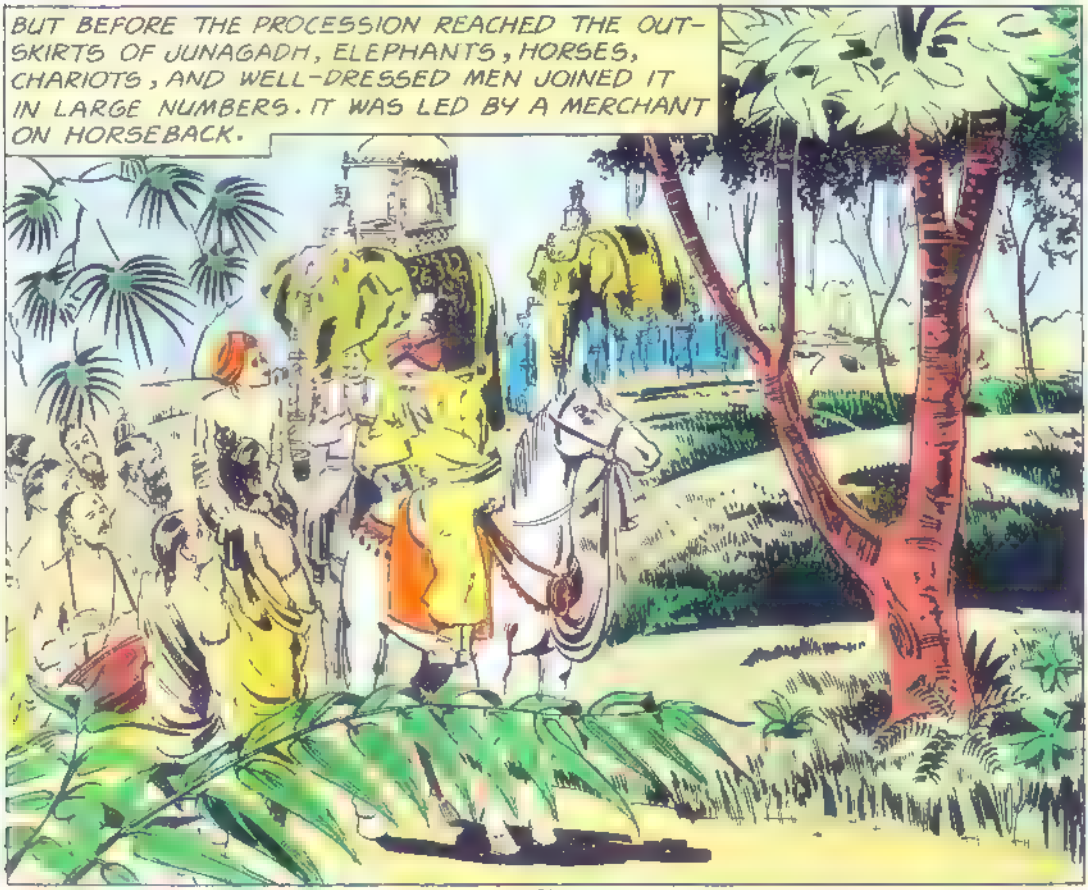
WHEN MADAN MEHTA RECEIVED THE LETTER–
THEY WRITE THAT MY DAUGHTER HAS BEEN ENGAGED TO THE SON OF A PAUPER. HE IS TOO POOR TO AFFORD EVEN THE EXPENSES OF A WEDDING.

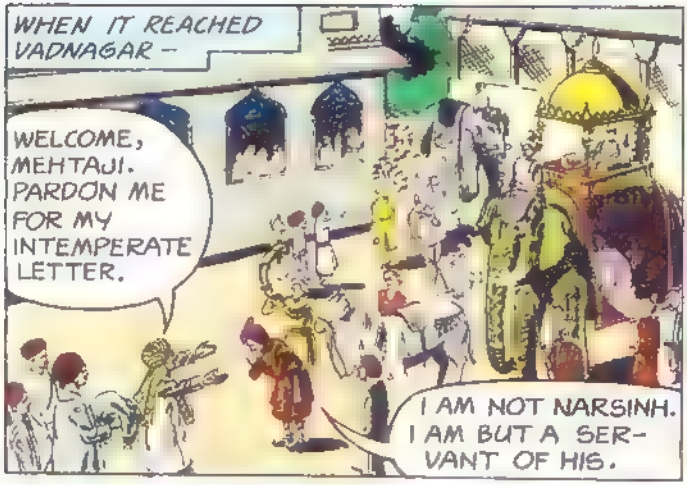

A LITTLE LATER–
HERE, GIVE THIS LETTER TO NARSINH MEHTA.

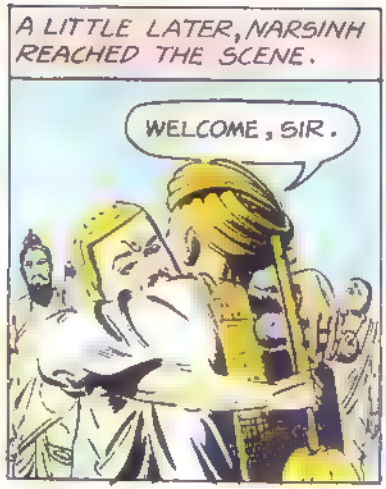
AT JUNAGADH–
WHAT DOES MEHTAJI SAY?
HE SAYS, IF WE DELAY THE WEDDING ANY LONGER, HE MAY HAVE TO BREAK OFF THE ENGAGEMENT.

WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW ?
WELL, WE WILL GO AHEAD. LORD KRISHNA WILL TAKE CARE OF THE REST.

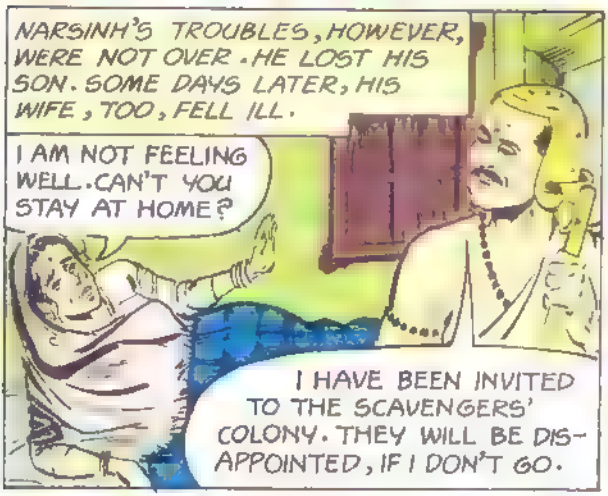

ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY, THE BRIDEGROOM'S PARTY LEFT JUNAGADH.
HA HA! A PROCESSION OF BEGGARS AND SADHUS!
WAIT TILL MADAN MEHTA SEES THIS.

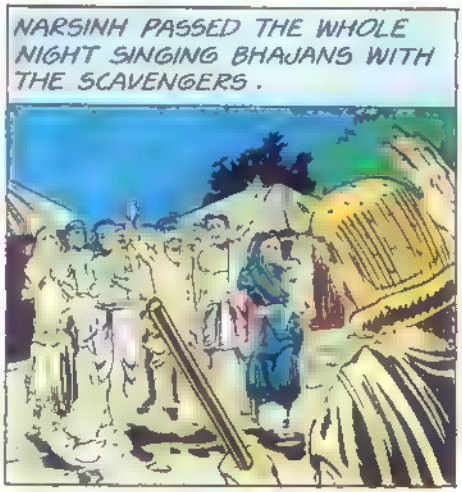

BUT BEFORE THE PROCESSION REACHED THE OUTSKIRTS OF JUNAGADH, ELEPHANTS, HORSES, CHARIOTS, AND WELL-DRESSED MEN JOINED IT IN LARGE NUMBERS. IT WAS LED BY A MERCHANT ON HORSEBACK.

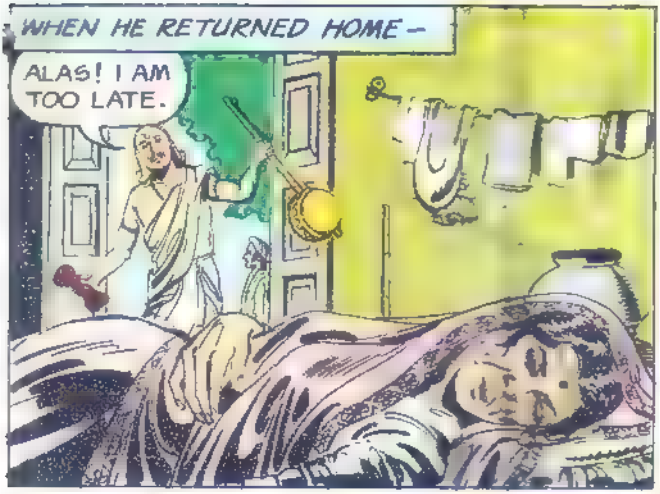

WHEN IT REACHED VADNAGAR –
WELCOME, MEHTAJI. PARDON ME FOR MY INTEMPERATE LETTER.
I AM NOT NARSINH. I AM BUT A SERVANT OF HIS.

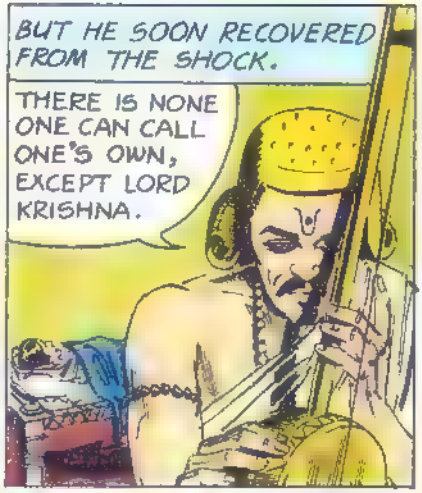

A LITTLE LATER, NARSINH REACHED THE SCENE.
WELCOME, SIR.

SHAMAL'S WEDDING TOOK PLACE WITH GREAT POMP AND CEREMONY.
NOW I KNOW! IT WAS LORD KRISHNA, IN THE GUISE OF A MERCHANT, WHO LED THE PROCESSION.

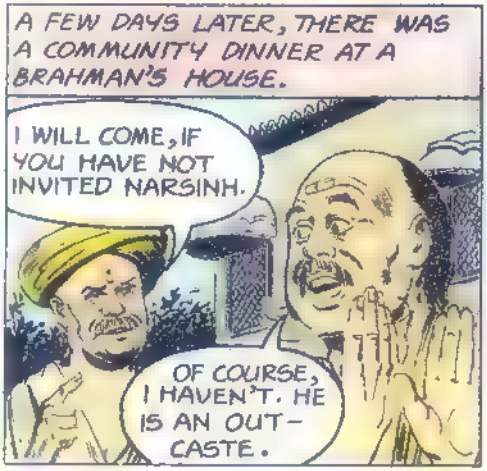

NARSINH'S TROUBLES, HOWEVER, WERE NOT OVER. HE LOST HIS SON. SOME DAYS LATER, HIS WIFE, TOO, FELL ILL.
I AM NOT FEELING WELL. CAN'T YOU STAY AT HOME?
I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO THE SCAVENGERS' COLONY. THEY WILL BE DISAPPOINTED, IF I DON'T GO.

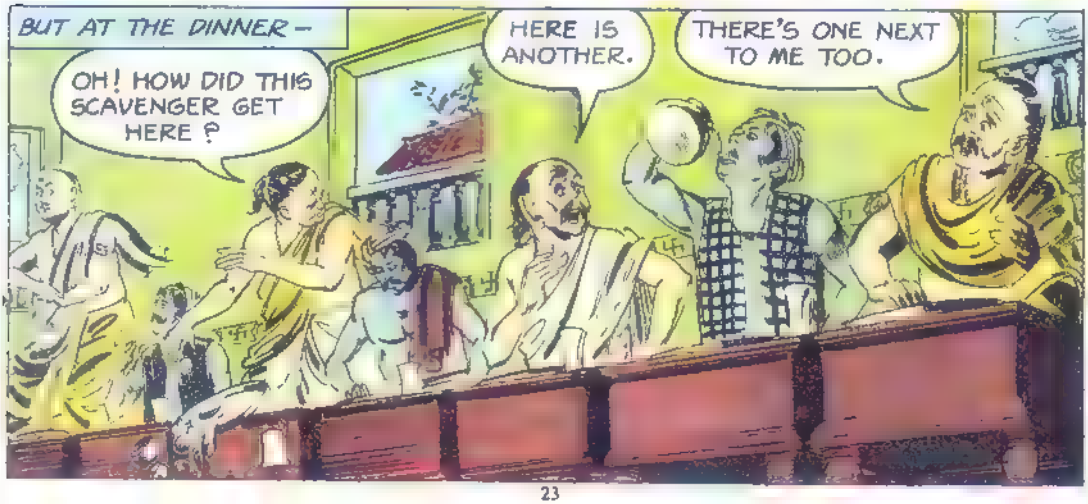

NARSINH PASSED THE WHOLE NIGHT SINGING BHAJANS WITH THE SCAVENGERS.

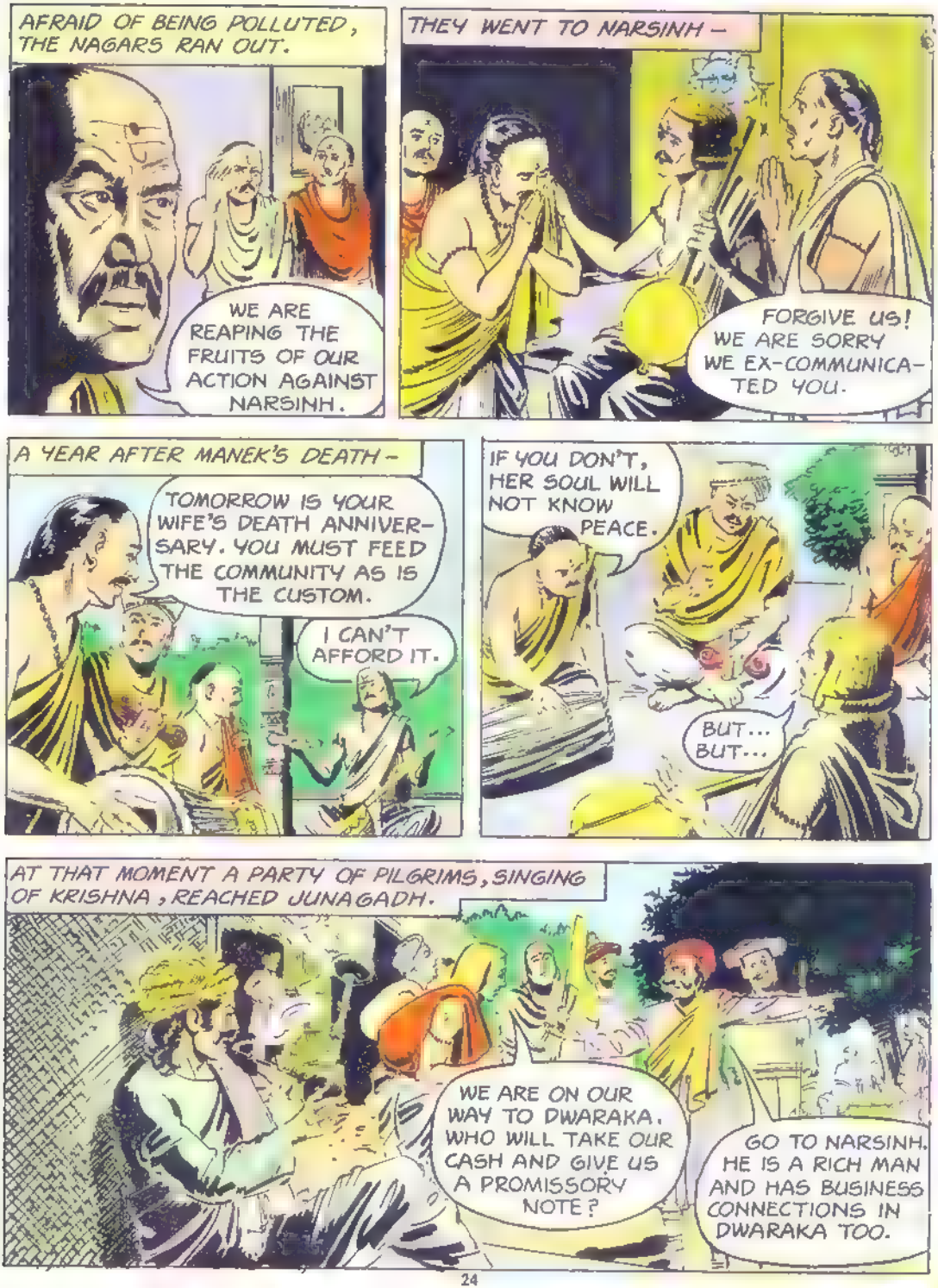

WHEN HE RETURNED HOME –
ALAS! I AM TOO LATE.

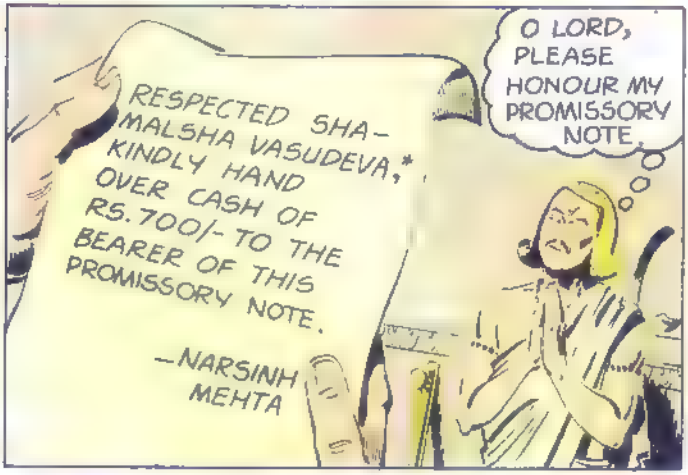

BUT HE SOON RECOVERED FROM THE SHOCK.
THERE IS NONE ONE CAN CALL ONE'S OWN, EXCEPT LORD KRISHNA.

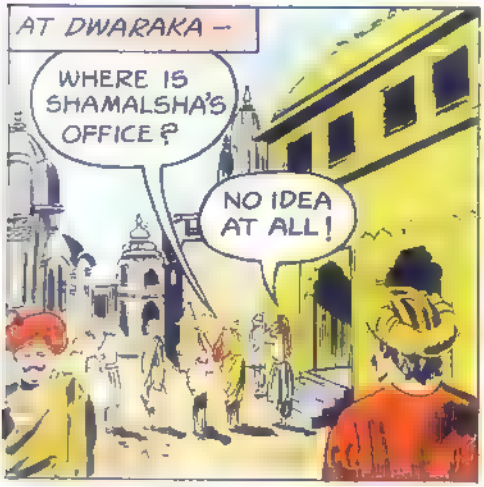
NARSINH'S VISIT TO THE SCAVENGERS' COLONY CREATED A FURORE.
HOW COULD NARSINH DO SUCH A THING?
WE MUST EX-COMMUNICATE HIM.

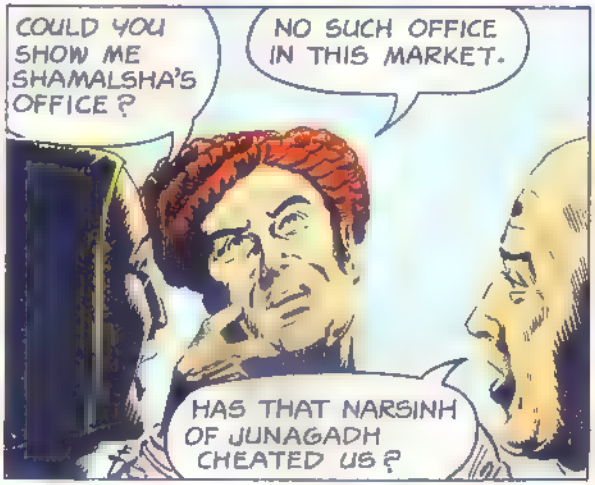

A FEW DAYS LATER, THERE WAS A COMMUNITY DINNER AT A BRAHMAN'S HOUSE.
I WILL COME, IF YOU HAVE NOT INVITED NARSINH.
OF COURSE, I HAVEN'T. HE IS AN OUT-CASTE.


BUT AT THE DINNER –
OH! HOW DID THIS SCAVENGER GET HERE?
HERE IS ANOTHER.
THERE'S ONE NEXT TO ME TOO.

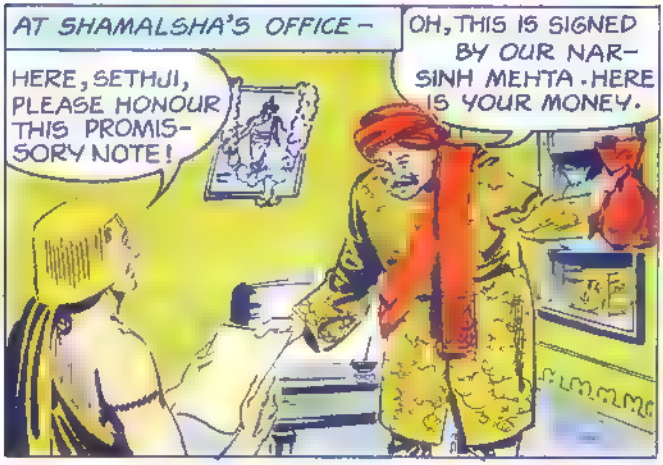

AFRAID OF BEING POLLUTED, THE NAGARS RAN OUT.
WE ARE REAPING THE FRUITS OF OUR ACTION AGAINST NARSINH.
THEY WENT TO NARSINH –
FORGIVE US! WE ARE SORRY WE EX-COMMUNICATED YOU.
A YEAR AFTER MANEK'S DEATH –
TOMORROW IS YOUR WIFE'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY. YOU MUST FEED THE COMMUNITY AS IS THE CUSTOM.
I CAN'T AFFORD IT.
IF YOU DON'T, HER SOUL WILL NOT KNOW PEACE.
BUT... BUT...
AT THAT MOMENT A PARTY OF PILGRIMS, SINGING OF KRISHNA, REACHED JUNAGADH.
WE ARE ON OUR WAY TO DWARAKA. WHO WILL TAKE OUR CASH AND GIVE US A PROMISSORY NOTE?
GO TO NARSINH. HE IS A RICH MAN AND HAS BUSINESS CONNECTIONS IN DWARAKA TOO.

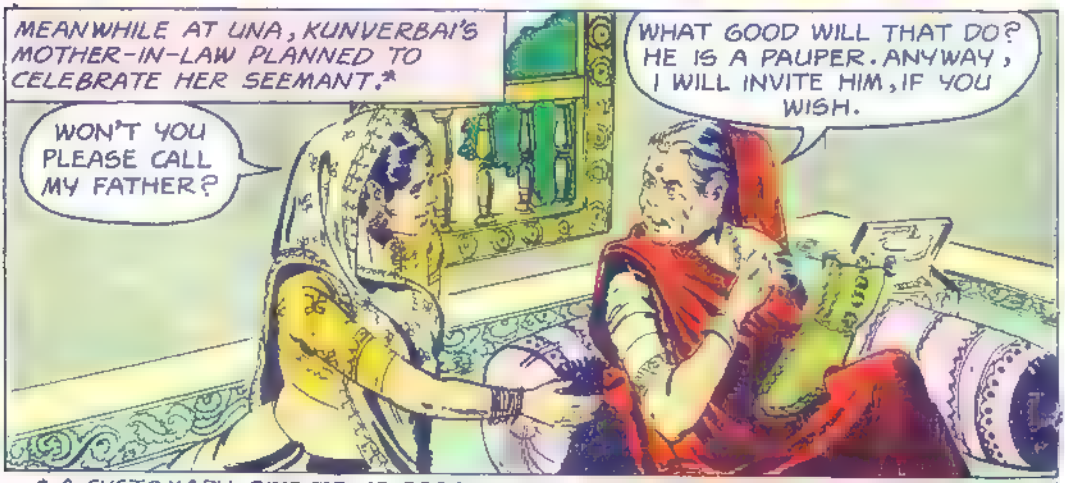






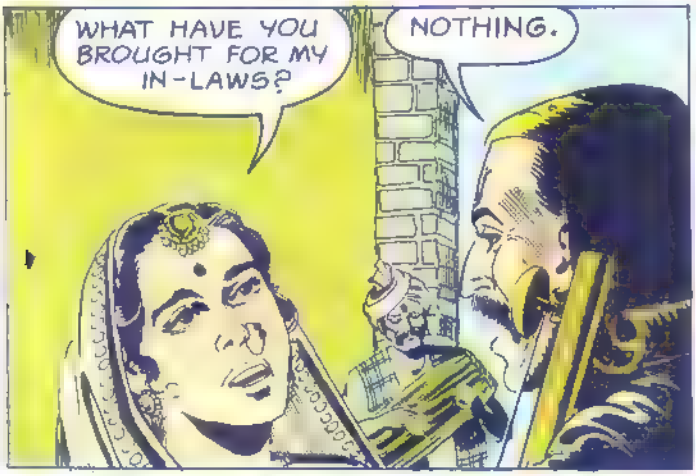
* LORD KRISHNA.



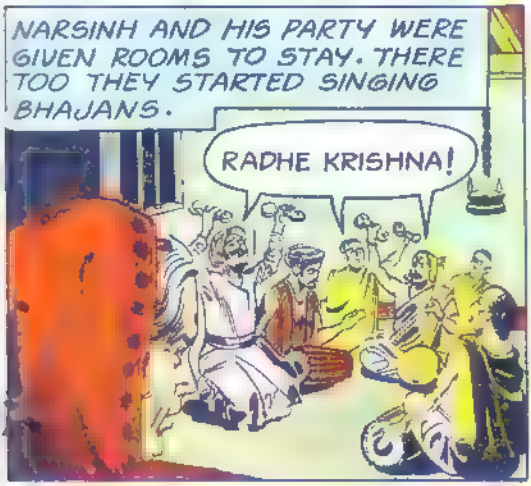


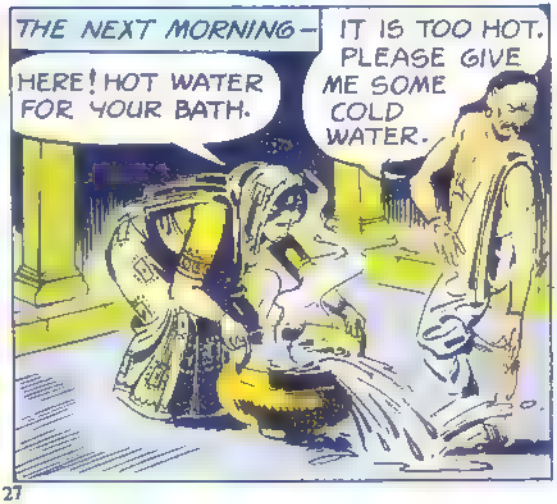
* A CUSTOMARY RITE TO CELEBRATE THE FIRST PREGNANCY AT WHICH THE ?L'S FATHER HAS TO BE PRESENT WITH COSTLY GIFTS FOR HIS DAUGHTER.

NARSINH ARRIVED AT UNA IN A CART DRAWN BY FAMISHED BULLOCKS. A FEW SADHUS WERE WITH HIM.
WELCOME, FATHER. WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?
HARIJANS, THE PEOPLE OF LORD KRISHNA. NO ONE ELSE WAS PREPARED TO COME WITH ME.


WHAT HAVE YOU BROUGHT FOR MY IN-LAWS?
NOTHING.

DON'T YOU KNOW IT IS CUSTOMARY ON AN OCCASION LIKE THIS TO GIVE AWAY GIFTS TO THE IN-LAWS? I FEEL MISERABLE.
DON'T WORRY, MY CHILD.


NARSINH AND HIS PARTY WERE GIVEN ROOMS TO STAY. THERE TOO THEY STARTED SINGING BHAJANS.
RADHE KRISHNA!


THE NEXT MORNING—
HERE! HOT WATER FOR YOUR BATH.
IT IS TOO HOT. PLEASE GIVE ME SOME COLD WATER.

YOU CLAIM TO BE A BHAGAT.* PRAY FOR RAIN AND GET YOUR COLD WATER.

IT SOON BEGAN POURING.

HE IS, INDEED, A BHAGAT.

LATER, THAT DAY –

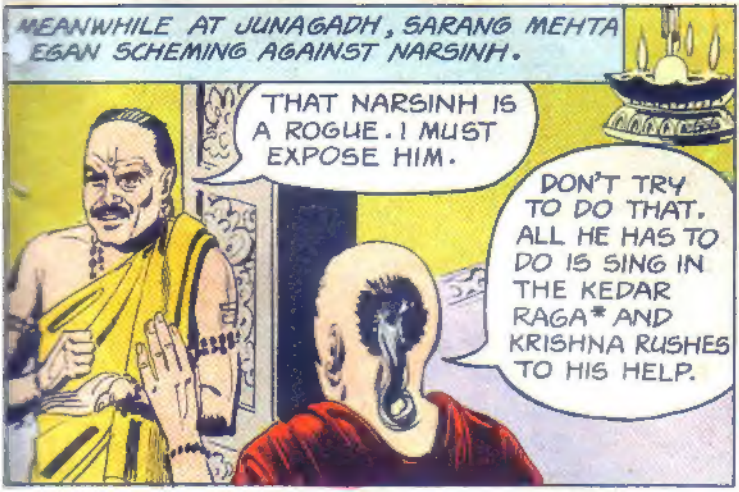
I AM NARSINH'S BUSINESS PARTNER. I HAVE COME TO DELIVER HIS GIFTS.

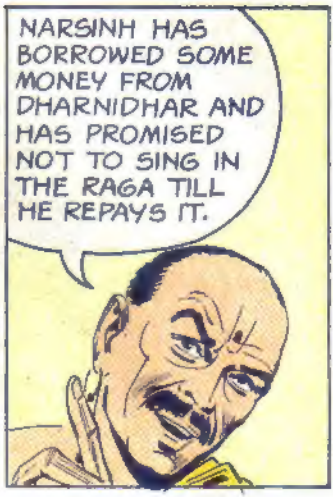
MOTHER, THIS SARI IS FOR YOU.

I CAN SEE THROUGH THAT GUISE. IT IS NONE OTHER THAN LORD KRISHNA.

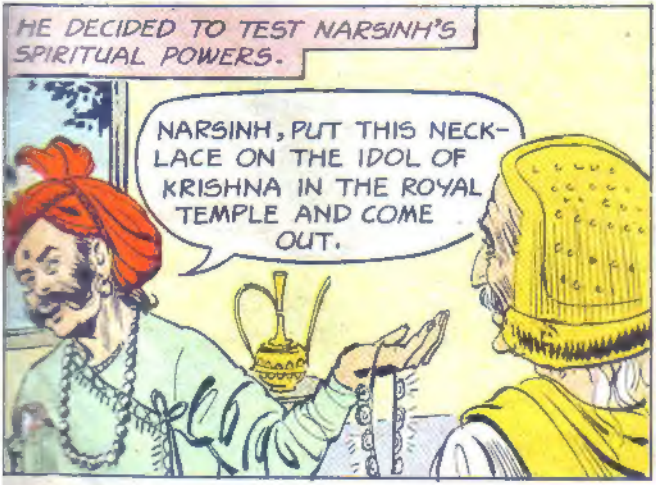
THESE ORNAMENTS ARE FOR YOU, MY DAUGHTER.

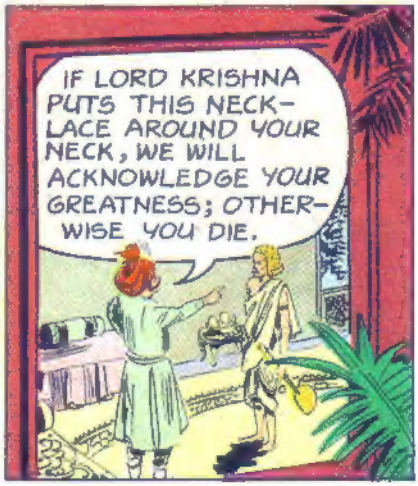
*A DEVOTEE


MEANWHILE AT JUNAGADH, SARANG MEHTA BEGAN SCHEMING AGAINST NARSINH.
THAT NARSINH IS A ROGUE. I MUST EXPOSE HIM.
DON'T TRY TO DO THAT. ALL HE HAS TO DO IS SING IN THE KEDAR RAGA* AND KRISHNA RUSHES TO HIS HELP.

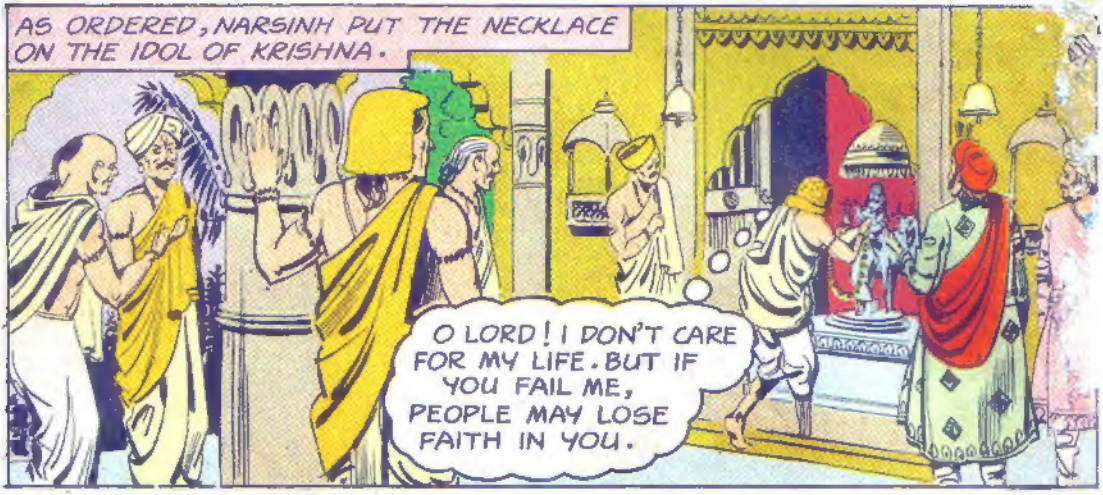

NARSINH HAS BORROWED SOME MONEY FROM DHARNIDHAR AND HAS PROMISED NOT TO SING IN THE RAGA TILL HE REPAYS IT.

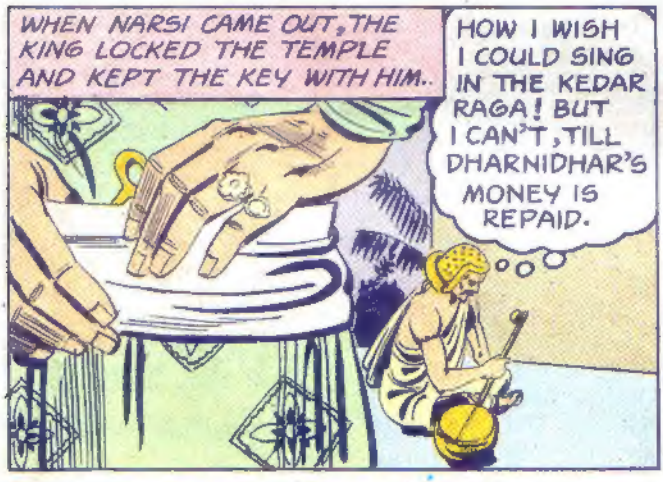
SARANG COMPLAINED TO RA*MANDLIK, THE KING OF JUNAGADH.
MAHARAJ, NARSINH IS A FRAUD. HE IS NO BHAGAT. HE SHOULD BE PUNISHED.
I CANNOT PUNISH HIM UNLESS I HAVE PROOF THAT HE HAS DELIBERATELY DUPED PEOPLE.


HE DECIDED TO TEST NARSINH'S SPIRITUAL POWERS.
NARSINH, PUT THIS NECKLACE ON THE IDOL OF KRISHNA IN THE ROYAL TEMPLE AND COME OUT.


IF LORD KRISHNA PUTS THIS NECKLACE AROUND YOUR NECK, WE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR GREATNESS; OTHERWISE YOU DIE.

* RAJA.


AS ORDERED, NARSINH PUT THE NECKLACE ON THE IDOL OF KRISHNA.
O LORD! I DON'T CARE FOR MY LIFE. BUT IF YOU FAIL ME, PEOPLE MAY LOSE FAITH IN YOU.

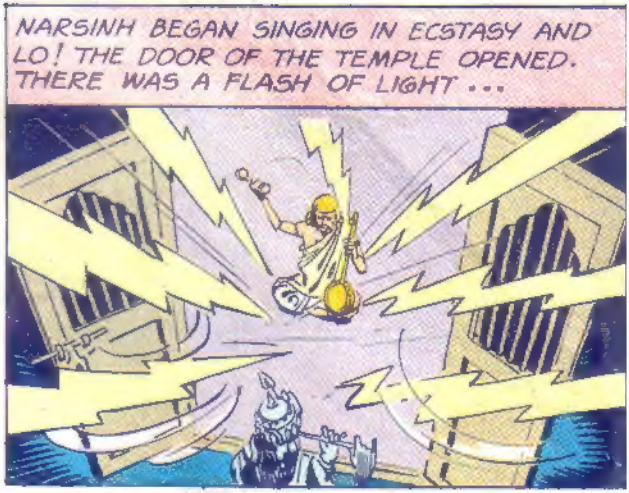

WHEN NARSI CAME OUT, THE KING LOCKED THE TEMPLE AND KEPT THE KEY WITH HIM..
HOW I WISH I COULD SING IN THE KEDAR RAGA! BUT I CAN'T, TILL DHARNIDHAR'S MONEY IS REPAID.

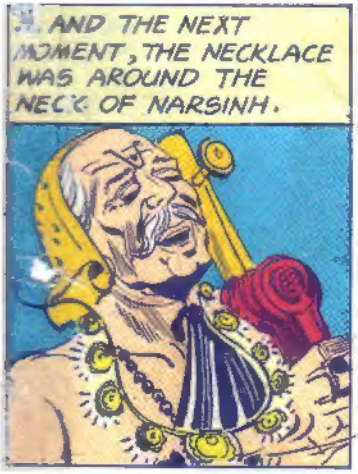
MEANWHILE AT DHARNIDHAR MEHTA'S HOUSE –
WHO COULD IT BE AT THIS HOUR OF THE NIGHT?

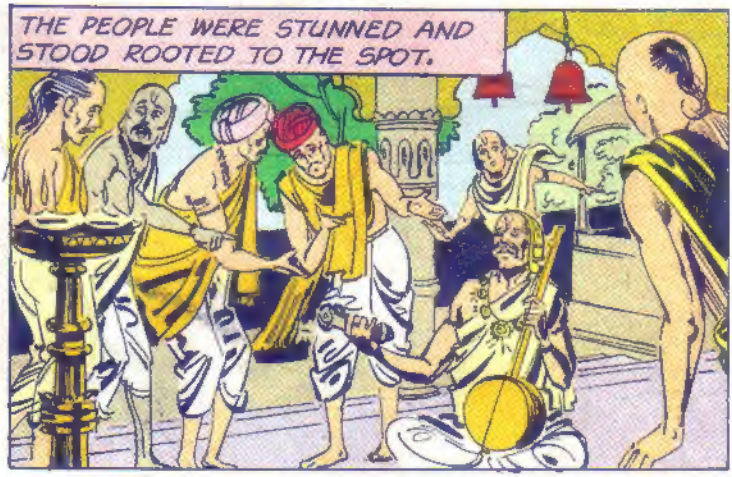
I HAVE COME TO REPAY THE MONEY YOU LENT NARSINH. PLEASE GIVE ME A RECEIPT.

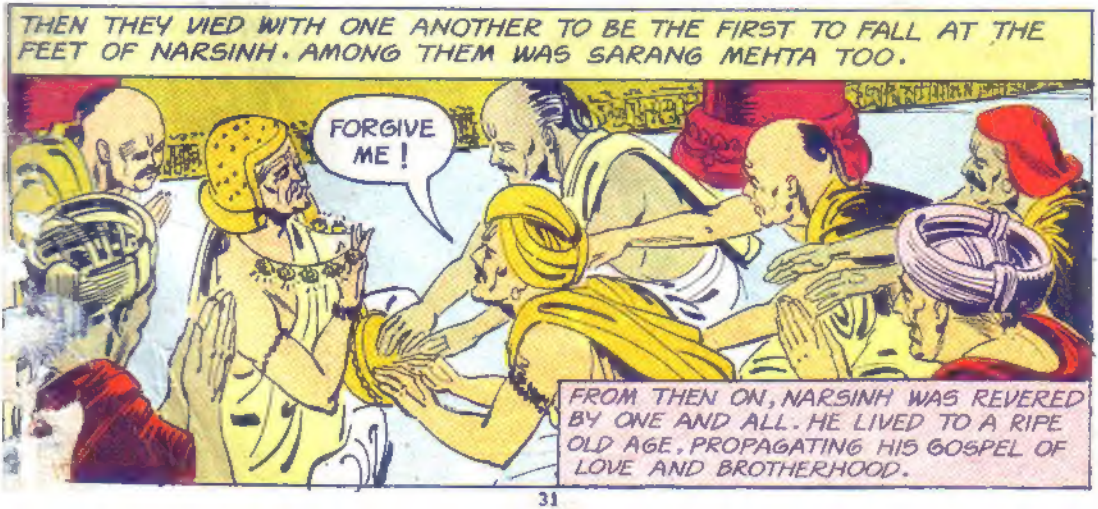
I WONDER, WHO THAT MAN WAS. HE HAD SUCH A DIVINE EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE.

HE RECEIPT FELL INTO THE LAP
NARSINH, WHO WAS SITTING
UTSIDE THE TEMPLE.
LORD KRISHNA MUST HAVE REPAID THE MONEY. I AM NOW FREE TO SING HIS RAGA.


NARSINH BEGAN SINGING IN ECSTASY AND LO! THE DOOR OF THE TEMPLE OPENED. THERE WAS A FLASH OF LIGHT ...


AND THE NEXT MOMENT, THE NECKLACE WAS AROUND THE NECK OF NARSINH.

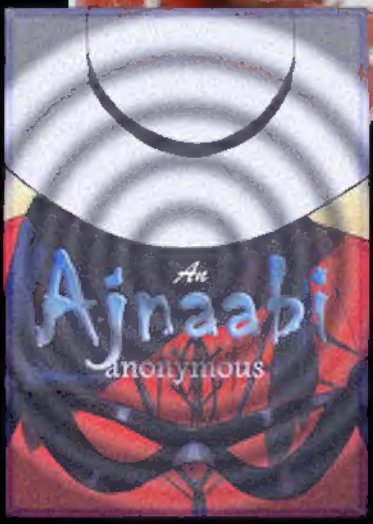

THE PEOPLE WERE STUNNED AND STOOD ROOTED TO THE SPOT.


THEN THEY VIED WITH ONE ANOTHER TO BE THE FIRST TO FALL AT THE FEET OF NARSINH. AMONG THEM WAS SARANG MEHTA TOO.
FORGIVE ME!
FROM THEN ON, NARSINH WAS REVERED BY ONE AND ALL. HE LIVED TO A RIPE OLD AGE, PROPAGATING HIS GOSPEL OF LOVE AND BROTHERHOOD.

BEWARE

scaN oR BE scanneD !

MEEWOW



Preservation